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Universe

SCIENCE FICTION

SANTA CLAUS PLANET * Frank M. Robinson

THE SHOEMAKER OF LAN * T. P. Caravan

THE BUG Edmond Ritter *DEATH SENTENCE* William Hoch

BEFORE THE FACT Zenna Henderson

WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT James McKimmey, Jr.

There IS a Time when Your Luck Will Change!

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—St. Luke 21:25. 26.

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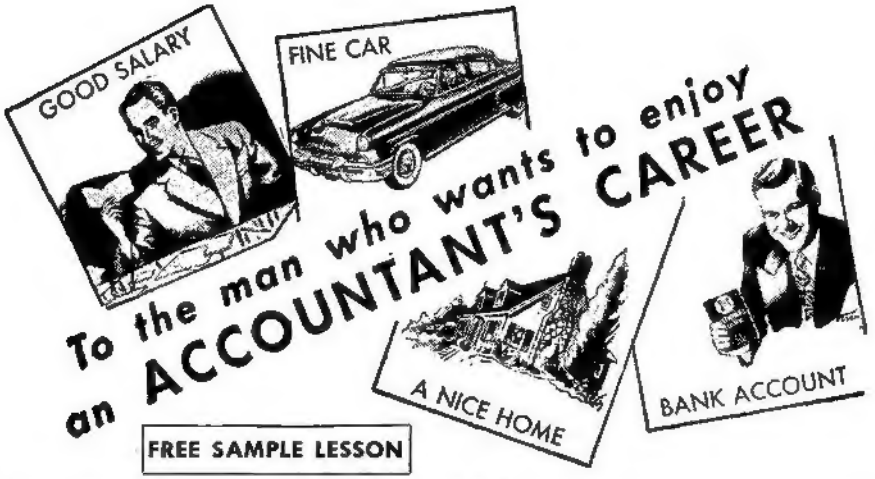

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UNIVERSE
SCIENCE FICTION

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THERE are many people, as we greet you with this October Merry Christmas (magazine publishing always results in this silly situation), who do not realize that in the space of 9 short issues UNIVERSE has become the leading science fiction magazine. This is regrettable, because your editors have known it since the very beginning. We knew it because of the plans we had in mind for the future. We knew it because Edmond Hamilton was coming up with STARMAN COME HOME, and its brilliant sequel. Yes, don't be so surprised and excited; Ed is working right now on the sequel, and it will appear in a very soon-to-come issue of UNIVERSE. Eventually everybody but the editors of all the other science fiction magazines will realize what we realize, and give UNIVERSE the approbation it so richly deserves

To those readers who wrote in thanking us for getting the old master to begin producing his famous stories once more, we nod condescendingly in modest pride. After all, didn't you *know* we'd come up holding the prize in the big shuffle?

What about that big shuffle? Wasn't it something! Everybody thought science fiction was really big-time magazine fodder. Well, it isn't. Science fiction is for just a few of us. Not more than 2% of the populaton. You can find out for yourselves by asking 100 people at random what science fiction is; and you'll get the answer that it's "that crazy kid stuff you see on TV these days". Those 98% of the population are just unable to comprehend what science fiction is: that it's twenty years of indoctrination, twenty years of experience, twenty years of evolvement through time-honored steps as complicated as a course in science in our most scientific universities. They don't know that it is a tradition, a fraternity, a political and moral revolution in thinking and behavior and the relationship of man toward man. They don't know it is tomorrow come to today to influence it. And because they don't know these things, they will never be attracted in great numbers to a magazine devoted to them. And there are several magazines today which measure up to the definition we've given.

One of them is *Astounding Science Fiction.* It is an editor, and a loyal, Campbell-minded clan. It isn't a magazine, in the mind of the 98%. It's that "deep bunch of engineer boys with the atoms in their hair". And there's UNIVERSE. A guy named Palmer and a bunch of readers who wouldn't think of addressing him as anything but "Rap". UNIVERSE is a family, as clannish as they are made. The most familiar statement in any letter written to UNIVERSE is: "I've been following YOU since 1928." Beyond these two magazines, the rest are just magazines, without the history the coat of arms, the family pride in past and present and future glory. That's why we've just gone through the "big delusion" and the "big disappointment". And at last the parasites, the termites and the clinging aphids have been given the "delousing" treatment. They lost their money, and how they deserve it!

Sometimes we wonder if this is good? Is there anything wrong with our readers writing in now and saying (just because we put back all the things that used to spell "RAP" in OTHER WORLDS and AMAZING and FANTASTIC) that "now we're back in the groove." Science fiction, they said, was evolving. We've always said it was evolving. We said it would stay ahead of science, but apparently it isn't. Today science is ahead of science fiction. Science is casting so big a shadow that the fiction that used to overshadow and forecast it is now itself overshadowed.

What is it that makes men think? Is it a textbook, full of thoughts already thought? No, it's something *interesting*, full of enticing tidbits of entertainment, which lead toward *questions*, not answers! That's what Palmer science fiction always has been. Ever we have propounded that we are out to entertain, but sly ones that we are, we are out to deceive! We practice a deception on you that leads to hard work—the business of thinking. We get you all wrapped in a "Hamilton" and you get so happy and excited by the adventure you forget you aren't supposed to be happy and excited about such childish things. And right in the middle of all this is a sort of "pioneer" spirit that induces dissatisfaction with "things as they are". And bingo, you're off into the REAL world of science fiction, a reader of a REAL science fiction magazine ,and you're a REAL fan!

What was it made Columbus search for a new route to the East? Not because he knew America was there, but because he had been vastly stimulated by the entertaining concept that the flat world wasn't flat at all, but round. Somebody had told him a "story", and so entertainingly that the actual "science" wrapped up in it became a "fantasy" rather than a fact; and unlike a fact, it had life and spirit and an intriguing personality. It led Columbus to action, not academic argument.

That's what a GOOD science fiction story must do. It must intrigue you by entertainment. It must lead you gently, not thrust

(*Concluded on Page* 68)

What business has a humble shoemaker meddling in rebellion, intrigue or battle? None at all, as the unambitious, unheroic, and very unhappy Tark the Shoemaker knew full well. But try as he would to explain this, his friends and enemies alike insisted that he was Tark the Liberator, returned at last to drive the Mauaii from Lan.

THE SHOEMAKER OF LAN

By T. P. Caravan

Illustrated by Alex Engel

TARK the Shoemaker sat happily at his workbench, tapping away at the loose sole of a sandal. The easy work pleased him, calling as it did for no great skill or exertion. He liked to sit crossleged in his little shop, watching the world go by outside: as long as it passed by him he was happy. Tark—we must admit it— was neither brave nor strong, for both bravery and strength had nearly been bred out of his people in the generations of Mauaii rule. Unconcerned, Tark tapped and hummed and watched the dust rise in the streets as the day grew older.

"Shoemaker!," Tark looked up, startled from his peaceful dreams. Bulking large in the doorway of his shop, cutting half the sunlight out of the day, stood Mauaii officer.

Flat on his face went Tark.

"Shoemaker! My boots!"

Tark leaped up, his heart thumping, and scurried to the pile of finished work in the back of his small shop. He took down a pair of black military boots and, wiping the dust from them against his shabby shirt, presented them to the officer.

"A poor job," the soldier said. "But good enough for this stinking planet. How much?"

Tark had no wish to be kicked with the boots he had just repaired. "Please," he said, feeling his heart furiously inside his frightened chest. "I beg you to accept my work as a gift."

The officer turned without speaking and marched from the shop.

Tark sat down at his workbench again. His happy mood was gone, his day ruined. Tark lived in constant fear that the Mauaii would someday find out who he was, or rather, who his great-grandfather had been. He himself was nothing, but his ancestor . . .it was safer not even to think about such things; so he sat tapping, tapping, tapping small tacks into the delicate soles of a cafe-dancer's slippers while the sunlight poured down onto the steaming heat of the dusty cobblestones outside. He worked swiftly, speeding up in order to keep his mind so busy that no squirming fear could creep into it, for Tark knew that this day was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation

of his planet from the first Mauaii dynasty, and the knowledge lay like an accusing terror in the back of his mind.

His efforts to dull his mind only keyed it up, and so he heard the shouts of the mob long before anybody else in any of the small cluttered shops along the street.

Seventy five years ago his great-grandfather, Tark the Liberator, had smashed the harsh rule of the Mauaii and driven them back to their own world, driven them fleeing and tumbling over each other in their terror to reach their space ships; and the memory of that defeat still embittered the Mauaii and intensified their cruelty to their reconquered subjects. Cruel enough they were normally, but the humiliation of their old defeat drove them to brutal excesses toward the people of Lan.

And now Tark the Shoemaker, the only living descendant of the great Liberator, shuddered in the warm air of his shop as the sounds of the mob grew louder. It was what he had feared all his life Terrified, he bent over his work, trying to drown out the oncoming shouts with the tap of his little hammer. His heart thumped louder than ever his hammer did, but the shouting grew in his ears.

"Tark! Tark! Return to your people! Tark! Lead us!"

The shouting grew to a roar as the mob turned the corner into the narrow street on which his shop stood. In front of it, retreating slowly, moved three Mauaii soldiers, walking sullenly backwards, facing the mob, drawn swords threatening any who moved forward too fast. One of them was the officer whose boots Tark had repaired, and the shoemaker gasped in fright as he saw the thin trickle of blood flowing scarlet down the officer's cheek. Mauaii blood! Tark knew what would come of this: to avenge the slightest wound the Mauaii would execute the leaders among the people of Lan. Even an obscure shoemaker might well tremble when he thought of the vengeance which might be taken if the mob resorted to more violence.

"Tark! Tark! Return!"

And he would no longer be an obscure shoemaker, not after today. The mob called for Tark the Liberator, but as his only living descendant, Tark the Shoemaker would have to stand in his place. Even as he shrank frightened toward the back of his shop, he was able to appreciate the irony of it. It was the belief of his people that a great man's soul could enter the body of a direct descendant at seventy five year intervals: only Tark, of all the Lanaii, knew—and who

would know better—that this belief was false.

He looked down at his skinny arm. Even if the inconceivable transmitigration took place, what could the great Liberator do with such a weak body? He had seen the tremendous statue in the main square of the city, and he knew that his great-grandfather had been a huge, iron-muscled warrior. The Mauaii let the statue stand as a mocking symbol of what the Lanaii had lost, but as a child Tark used to go and look for hours at it, hoping desperately to grow into such a man; he knew now how vain those hopes had been.

The soldiers backed slowly past the open front of his shop, and the first of the mob poured into the doorway. "Tark!" Cheering, they pulled him into the street. "Tark the Liberator!" Panic-stricken, he took a last look back at his shop. It was being looted already. He would never see it again. Even if he escaped from the hero-worshiping people, the Mauaii would seize him. Hurried along willy-nilly in the front ranks of the mob, he felt the officer's eyes on him, and he tried to shrink back into the safety of the crowd.

"Shoemaker, I'll know you," the officer promised grimly.

"It isn't . . . I don't . . ." He broke off in terror. How could he ever explain? Panic suddenly drowned him in its agony, and he knew nothing more until he found himself in the public square of the city, standing under the statue of the Liberator, while thousands of his people cheered until the rooftops seemed to sway over his head.

A burly, red-headed man hoisted him up on the pedestal and then jumped up with him. "Shut up," he whispered. "Don't say anything." Bewildered, Tark nodded.

"Lanaii," shouted the burly man. "People!"

The crowd began to quiet down. Tark looked trembling over the thousands of upturned faces. Couldn't they see how weak a man he was and how tremendously the statue loomed over him? Couldn't they tell his great grandfather's spirit would laugh at such a descendant? But he only saw illusion and false hope in the faces of his people.

"People of Lan!" The burly man stood beside Tark, his red hair glisting in the sunlight. "Listen to me now, for it is time to speak. It is time to speak, and it is time to rise. Seventy five years ago—who forgets the date?" He paused as a roar rose from the crowd. "Seventy five years ago the mighty Tark arose—Tark the Liberator!" Another roar. "And he cleaned the world of Lan, cleaned out the last

Mauaii and gave us back our planet ." He waited for silence. "And then he died." The crowd stood motionless, living through the familiar story. "He died and the Mauaii came back with their whips and swords and cruelty. They came back with pride and oppression. They came back with murder and torture in their hands. They came back and took over our world." He paused. You could hear the heavy breathing of the crowd. "But they did not know that Tark would come back too. They did not know that when the great cycle of three times twenty five years had been completed our Liberator would return. They did not know that this humble shoemaker, living in obscurity, was the descendant of our greatest hero. They did not know that today Tark, Tark the Shoemaker would become Tark the Liberator!"

The roar that answered him was like nothing Tark had ever heard before. He reeled under the impact of the noise. "Stand up, you damn fool," the red headed man whispered to him.

"And they did not know that this day would mark the end of their tyranny on the planet of Lan." The orator leaned over the edge of the pedestal and someone handed up a huge sword. The speaker took it and waved it over his head. His voice rose to a tremendous shout. "And they did not know that this sword, the sword of Tark the Liberator, would again drive them to destruction." He turned to face the shoemaker. "Tark!" he shouted. "The people of Lan return you your sword. Use it as you did before."

He almost dropped it, it was so heavy.

"Say something," snarled the red head.

Tark could hardly speak. "Er . . .Thank you," was all he could get out. "I'll take good care of it."

A roar of laughter rose from the crowd. "Tark!" they cried. "Tark forever!" And the orator slapped him on the back with a heavy fist. "A hero speaks," he shouted. "No braggart, no boaster here. He holds the silver sword of liberation. You have heard him. He will guard it with his life. In his hands its jewelled hilt will be red with the blood or tyrants. Tark has returned, Tark the Liberator!"

He looked down at the sword: it glittered in the sunlight. Tark had never seen jewels before except when some great Mauaii lady would pass at a distance. But did it have to be so heavy? When he looked up again the red-headed orator was gone, and he stood alone on the pedestal beneath the mighty statue. How could he ever explain

that the great Liberator's soul had not entered his body— that he was as weak and timid as he had ever been? "I . . ." he said, and the crowd cheered! "I . . ." and they cheered again, louder! Looking down, he saw tears of joy on many a face.

Over the heads of the crowd something was coming toward him, passed hand over hand. A throne. The war throne of Lan, in which only the war-leader of the Lanaii might sit. And it was coming toward him!

Frightened, he looked down at his heavy sword. Would he ever see his own room again? He had a few slices of meat waiting in the tiny kitchen. It was rare for Tark to be able to afford meat, but he had meant to celebrate the safe passage of this dangerous day with a feast of sorts.

The throne was almost up to the pedestal, passed by eager hands. Not even the ruling kings of Lan, in the far off days before they had gracefully given way to the Lanaii democracy, not even they had sat in that throne unless they were leading their armies against the rare enemies of their people. For centuries the world had been at peace, the old dynastic struggles long forgotten before the sudden overwhelming first arrival of the Mauaii. There had been no war even then, for the Mauaii had conquered the whole planet almost instantly: the people of Lan had forgotten the deadly arts of battle. But Tark the Liberator had sat in that throne during his brief life as a leader of the resurgent Lanaii, and now it was coming to him! He shrank back in the shadow of the great statue.

The crowd roared its approval as the throne reached him. What could he do? There was no way out except to play the farce to the end. He knew he lacked the necessary courage to destroy his people's hopes. Sadly he stepped forward and took the throne, clutching the jewelled sword as he did so. The thunder of the crowd's applause was like an earthquake. "To the governor's palace!" someone shouted, and instantly the throne was whirled up on twenty shoulders and carried through a path which miraculously opened in the mob.

It didn't seem right, somehow, that the man who was expected to bring freedom back to his people should be carried like a despot through the streets by his fellow men. Freedom should go hand in hand with equality, but the adoration given him seemed almost as great as the humiliating groveling the Mauaii extracted from their underlings. It didn't seem right: and, of course, it wasn't right, es-

pecially since everyone was looking with worshipful eyes at the wrong man.

His carriers were jogging along the main thoroughfare now, with the crowd of thousands running along behind them. Tark could see the golden turrets of the Mauaii governor's palace ahead of him. In the bobbing throne he had forgotten his fear, as if it had been with him so long he no longer felt it, but a sudden frightened sweat broke out on his forehead as he saw files of Mauaii soldiers running down the long street toward him. The sword in his hands seemed to slip in the clammy grip of his palms, and he clutched it tighter with a hopeless determination. "Let me down," he shouted, and the bearers lowered the throne to the street. He stood up.

The crowd was silent behind him. Despite their faith, he sensed them backing slowly away, but he was afraid to look around. If he saw their fear . . .

—I mustn't faint, he told himself, and I mustn't run away. He clutched the sword: the bright sky reeled around him. He took a deep shuddering breath. Why had he never fully enjoyed his life? Why had he never known even the glory of simply breathing in the sunlight?

—Great grandfather, he thought, if you can, come to me now. If there is any truth to this belief in a great man's return to the body of his descendant come to me now. Now. I need you.

Was the sword lighter in his shaking hands, or was it only his frantic wish that fooled him into thinking it was?

He heard a frightened gasp go up from the crowd behind him as the soldiers drew nearer.

—Help me now, he prayed, not for myself but for these people who are trusting me to protect them.

Was his arm stronger?

He lifted the sword and stepped forward. He had never held a sword before—the people of Lan were forbidden to have weapons—but he knew that if Tark the Liberator were entering his body that he would be one of the greatest swordsmen ever to live. Squaring his shoulders, he stepped out briskly toward the oncoming troops.

"So, Shoemaker! What sort of cobbler's tool is that?" The officer whose boots he had repaired—was it only a few hours ago?—was laughing at him. "You are the leader of these people, Shoemaker? You'll need more than resoling after we're done with you." Drawing his sword, the officer approached Tark.

—Now! he thought, guide my arm and give me your greatness.

Now or never. Tark leaped forward and tried to swing the heavy sword at the officer's head.

The next thing he knew he was lying in the gutter and the soldiers were running after the screaming crowd. He graped frantically for his sword.

"Is this what you want, Shoemaker?" The officer was laughing down at him." I've never seen a clumsier attempt in my life." He held the sword mockingly toward Tark. "Silver! what kind of silly metal is that to make a weapon of? It won't take an edge, it's heavy, and it's weak. Like the minds of your people, hey fool?" He put the point of the sword on Tark's throat.

Abject misery flowed through the shoemaker's mind. If he had only had the courage to deny the red-headed man's speech he wouldn't have been here now, waiting for death. If he had only had the sense to know his great grandfather's spirit was not in him and never would be in him he wouldn't have led the crowd of his people into the trap the soldiers had laid for them. That, even more than the thought of his own death, filled his eyes with blurred tears.

"You needn't weep," the officer said. "A heroic shoemaker like you deserves a heroic death." He took the sword away. "Tomorrow . . . in the arena. Let's go, Shoemaker. Get up out of the gutter. Tomorrow you'll pay well for this scratch on my forehead. Let's go, hero. Move!"

And so Tark the Shoemaker was kicked with his own boots, after all.

"It didn't work," the girl said. "I told you it wouldn't work."

"Listen," said the red-headed man, "it would have worked if the poor fool had any guts at all. How was I to know he'd let them capture him so easily? If he'd put up even the slightest fight they would have killed him and everything would have been all right."

"You're an idiot, Rogar," the girl snapped. "Now he's going to be slaughtered in the arena tomorrow. Everyone will see what he is: a coward!" She spat out the word in disgust. "What help is that to us?"

"Leave it to me, Princess. I'll think of something."

"Just see that he dies properly,'" she said.

The next day's sunlight glared down on the arena, shimmering on the blood-stained sand. Men fought and died there, fought and died for the pleasure of the Mauaii rulers. Again and again the air shuddered under the swift whispering passage of arrows as a small group or archers tried to hold off

the charge of a larger group of men armed with heavy iron clubs: if once the club-wielding men could close with the archers the battle would be decided in their favor, and they formed and re-formed desperately, trying to close the deadly gap between them, but each time they fell back in disorder. As the last of the men with clubs fell to the bloody sand, a blast of trumpets proclaimed the archers triumphant.

Pompous in his scarlet-trimmed box, the Mauaii governor made a signal. A gate at the far end of the arena slowly creaked open, and the archers gasped as they saw their death approaching. They had expected freedom as a reward for victory. With a curse, one of them whirled and shot his arrow squarely at the governor, but it bounced back from the screen protecting him: all of the best seats, those in which the Mauaii sat, were covered by this transparent screen. Only the people of Lan, many of whom had been forced to attend the bloody rites, sat in seats unprotected from stray missles.

Now the Lanaii sat in wretched silence as they watched their countrymen die under the fangs of the wild beasts that had been set upon them. No archer, no matter how powerful, could stop one of these savage animals which had been brought from the Mauaiian home planet of Ter; and the Lanaii archers, like the Lanaii club-wielders, were only ordinary citizens whom the Mauaii had picked up and given a week's training before sending them to fight and die in the arena.

When the arena was at last cleared, the trumpets blew again. High and shrill they blew their message to the waiting Tark as he sat sorrowfully in his dungeon under the stands. He knew he was about to die, and he knew he would die poorly, for he had never known such fright and misery in his life. All night he had prayed for bravery, but it had not come to him.

He shuddered as the clanking iron door of his cell swung open. "Let's go, there," a guard ordered. "Do I have to pick you up and carry you?" Tark climbed wearily to his feet. "I hear you're the big hero around here,'" the guard said.

"Not me," said Tark. "Not me."

"Not you? You wouldn't be trying to fool a poor soldier, now, would you?" He jabbed Tark lightly with the point of his spear and Tark scurried ahead of him. "A girl in a cafe last night offered me ten thousand *shofars* if I'd help you get away."

Tark's heart leaped inside him: for a minute he couldn't speak, and the noise of the crowd outside

was a great buzzing in his ears. "Escape?" He threw his hands out to the soldier. "You're going to let me go?" Life had never been so dear to him.

The soldier guffawed. "Hero," he said, "do you think all the money on this lousy planet could buy a Mauaii soldier? And besides, I never trust a woman. How did I know I wouldn't get paid with a knife in the throat? On your way, now. Let's go," He shoved Tark along the dark hallway toward the blaze of sunlight coming in through the entrance.

Hope frustrated is worse than no hope at all. Sick at heart, Tark walked toward the arena. What tortures were waiting for him there?

Had it only been one day since he sat in the peaceful obscurity of his cobbler's shop? He groaned inwardly.

"What's going to happen to me?" he whispered hopelessly.

"You're not much of a hero after all, are you shoemaker?" a loud voice said. Clinking in full armor, the officer who had captured him came up. "I'll take over the prisoner," he said, and the soldier saluted and left. "I'll tell you what's going to happen," the officer sneered. "We're going to march out there together, and the herald is going to give you a choice of deaths: you can die the easy death by poison; or you can die on my sword's point, and I tell you, Shoemaker, I'm going to chop you into a quivering wreck before I let you die." He slapped Tark heavily on the back. "I don't like your face, Shoemaker."

The trumpets blew again. Tark walked toward the bright doorway almost with relief. Having spent the night trembling in fear of being tortured, the knowledge that he could choose an easy death made him feel a little better.

"Wait!" the officer shouted as they reached the doorway. "Am I supposed to slaughter this animal without refreshment?"

One of the arena servants, a Lanaian girl, rushed over with a goblet of wine. As the officer drank it, she stood there, waiting to carry the goblet away; and, to Tark's amazement, made a swift face at him. He shook his head in bewilderment. Swiftly she gestured toward the officer and closed both eyes tightly for a brief instant.

Crazy, Tark decided.

The sight of the wine reminded him that he hadn't been fed since his capture. Now he would never eat that meat he had waiting for him home. His landlady's fat husband would probably get it.

Instead of handing the goblet back to the serving girl, the officer smashed it against the side of the

passageway. 'All right," he said. "Let's go. This armor is fine in battle, but it's too heavy to stand around in. Come on, Shoemaker, or do you need another kick?"

As they stepped together into the arena, Tark felt the serving girl squeeze his arm briefly in encouragement.

—But why should it be me? he thought. I don't want to die. Why me? I have nothing against the Mauaii. I'd do anything . . . anything . . .

Anguished, he heard the roar of the crowd as the bright sunlight struck him.

"So you failed, Rogar."

"Princess, I tried everything. I had men ready to poison his food but the Mauaii didn't bother to feed him. I sent a man to stab him in his cell but the fellow couldn't even get to the door."

"I trust you punished him properly?"

"The man is dead, Princess."

"I wish Tark were dead in his place."

"He will be."

She rose angrily from her chair. "But he'll die like a coward. What good did it do us to set all yesterday's uprising afoot? We were going to use Tark's death as a rallying point, a propaganda weapon. Now what can we do?"

"We can wait, Princess. Tark is nothing more than a pawn." He paced up and down the room. "We can set a rumor going that he was not really the Liberator's descendant. We can say that he was an imposter, a fake The people will believe anything if you tell them often enough."

"Roger," she said, "I'll give you one more chance. Somehow we must rouse the people and keep them roused. As for this Tark business, we'll consider it a temporary failure, an unimportant setback in our plans."

"Very well." He glared at her as she left. Some day she'd learn who really held the power.

He walked slowly forward, feeling the sunlight warm on his back. In the best seats the Mauaii were laughing scornfully at this shabby little hero of the people of Lan, but Tark's own people sat silently as they saw their dreams of liberation about to die.

Suddenly flowers fell at his feet, flowers thrown from the crowd. He stooped and picked one up. It lay delicately in his hand, the soft yellow petals surrounding the crimson center. It was the *barumpyati*, the flower traditionally reserved to deck the grave of the heroic dead. Tark raised his eyes to the crowd: they still had faith in

him. They longed so desperately for freedom that they were unable to see clearly what he was—a poor shoemaker and nothing else. Self-pity poured over him: this delusion of his people was going to cause his death.

Death! He had not realized until now the full meaning of what was going to happen to him. Terrified, he raised his eyes to the golden sun overhead. A few birds wheeled across the empty sky. He shuddered.

Another high blast of the trumpets. Silence fell across the crowd. Tark and the officer stood in front of the governor's box.

In full ceremonial costume, a herald marched into the center of the arena.

"Now for punishment," he shouted according to the old formula of the Mauaii. "Now for punishment comes one Tark, a shoemaker of the people of Lan. He confesses his guilt and begs mercy."

Tark looked around, surprised. He would have confessed anything they had asked him to, but nobody had spoken to him between the time he had been flung into his dungeon and the time the soldier had come to bring him to the arena. A sudden hope flared in his chest.

"Now to give punishment comes the noble warrior, Sopus, officer in the armies of Ter. Blood has been drawn. How say you, Sopus, do you grant mercy?"

The officer stepped forward. "Mercy? I grant him death."

The golden light still poured down, but it seemed to Tark that a cloud had moved over the sun, chilling him to the marrow of his bones.

The governor leaned forward in his seat. "Shoemaker," he said, "the Mauaii are a merciful people. We grant you the choice of deaths. Which will it be? Death by poison, painless and swift, or death by the sword, which will come as it may."

It'll come through the belly," the officer whispered. "You'd better choose the coward's death."

The herald approached Tark and held out a tiny bottle. Fascinated, he gazed at the colorless liquid. There it was. The end. His heart beat as if it would burst from his chest. Couldn't they hear it? He was unable to speak, unable to open his dry lips. The sun was hot again, burning down into his skull through his thin sandy colored hair. He closed his eyes.

"He choses death by the sword," the herald cried.

"No," said Tark. "Wait . . . I . . ." But his protests were drowned by the great cheer which rose from the Lanaii in the stands.

"You're a fool, Shoemaker," whispered the officer, "but I didn't think you had the guts to stand up and fight me."

The trumpets burst into melody. Tark stood appalled: he had thrown away his chance for an easy death. Was it fear that had sealed his mouth? Certainly panic had had much to do with it, but hadn't there been a touch of . . . of what? . . . of fighting spirit? Again and again the trumpets blew the call to combat, deafening poor Tark with their noise. —Nonsense, he thought, be honest: it was nothing but fear that kept you from the poison.

Sopus, the officer whom he was to fight, had turned and marched to the other side of the arena, where a servant handed him his heavy battle helmet and huge shield. Now he was armored in thick metal from head to knees.

Someone touched Tark on the shoulder. He whirled around with a small cry of panic. The girl, the arena servant who had made faces at him in the passageway, handed him the useless silver sword and a great shield. The herald stood beside her.

"The weapons of Lan," he shouted. "A shield to hide behind, a sword to glitter in futility, and armor—" he flicked disdainfully at Tark's shirt—" armor of dirty cloth. Timid, weak and unreliable: here is the hero of the Lanaii!" A roar of laughter went up from the Mauaii.

The girl winked at him. Winked! Even at this dreadful moment he found time to pity her feeble mind.

The shield was not designed as a combat weapon: even if it had been, Tark wouldn't have known how to handle it. Clumsily he held it in front of him, clutching at the hilt of the sword with his other hand. He really needed both hands to manage the sword, but he clung frantically to the illusion of safety the shield gave him. It was much more in his nature to defend himself by hiding or by flight than by taking the offensive.

Of course he had no hope of winning against a trained soldier, even if his weapons had been as good, and even if he had worn the armor the officer was wearing. As it was, he realized, he had no chance at all.

And then it struck him that the Mauaii might be afraid of him!

Sending a fully armored warrior against a weak shoemaker dressed in his ordinary clothing, sending a professional soldier with his battle-tested weapons against a civilian armed only with weak ceremonial sword and shield—was this the vaunted Mauaii heroism? It looked as if they had heard of the Lanaii belief that the Liberator's mighty

spirit had entered his body. It looked as if everybody on the two planets believed he was a great warrior. The Mauaii, at any rate, were taking no chances. He smiled weakly at the irony of it as he looked up for one last sight of the golden sun.

The governor made a signal and the trumpets blasted.

Swaggering in his heavy armor, the officer started across the arena toward Tark.

"Has he been killed yet?"

"The messenger will bring us word as soon as he's dead, Princess. I thought we agreed to forget about him. He's nothing to us now."

She strode across the floor. "I know," she said, "but . . ."

Roger grabbed her by the wrist. "But what?"

"I still . . . Suppose there's something in it?"

"By all the gods! Something in what?"

Angrily she shook herself free. "Something in this belief that the Liberator's spirit can enter his body."

Flopping down on the chair she had left, Rogar shouted with laughter.

"You forget yourself," she cried angrily. "I am princess of the people of Lan!"

He laughed louder. "And you're just as superstitious as the oldest fishwoman in the marketplace. You'd better read those reports again. Your great-grandfather wouldn't be pleased. Gods, Princess, don't you know he started that myth himself to cover up the fact that it was he who killed the Liberator? Old Tark was intending to restore democracy here on Lan, and we couldn't have that, now, could we? Where would that leave us? Don't fall for our own propaganda, Princess. It will take more than an impressionable woman to rule this world once we force the Mauaii out: it will take a hand of steel and a mind of iron. You can afford no weaknesses."

"All the same," she said. "I'm sorry we ever stirred this business up. I'll be glad when he's dead."

The cold sweat of fear dripped from his brow and ran into his eyes. His breath came and went quickly through his open mouth. He stood rooted to the spot as Sopus, moving slower as he neared Tark, approached. Uncontrollably his knees began to tremble. He took a step backwards and the shield, rapping against his leg, tilted away from his body.

He tried to bring it back with his arm, but the clumsy grip let it tilt further away, uncovering his chest. Panic stricken, he saw his enemy

drawing back his sword. The whole shield was slipping from his sweaty handhold, sliding to the left as it did so, falling to the ground. Forgetting everything else in his fright, he dropped the sword and grabbed at the shield with both hands, falling to his knee as he did so in an effort to keep behind it.

Sopus' sword whistled by over his head. He didn't even see it go past.

His shield flopped onto the bloody sand and he scrabbled desperately for it, whimpering with fear. Nothing else mattered. Then he heard the mingled roar of the crowd and fell back just in time to miss being cut in half. He scrambled to his feet, defenseless now with neither sword nor shield.

Sopus slowly approached, a deadly figure in his heavy armor. A few minutes ago terror had made Tark unable to move, but now it sent his feet dancing in an uncontrolled jig of pure agony: he had tapped a vast reservoir of energy as his body made a last frantic effort to escape death. He rushed in desperation around the soldier, trying to reach his sword and shield, but Sopus, though he seemed to move with ponderous slowness, held him away from them. Tark knew that this burst of energy would soon pass, leaving him an easy mark for the officer's glittering sword. His horror of death, though it gained him this new strength, robbed him of the coordination needed to make use of it, and his flying feet tripped over nothing. Down he went. His scream was drowned in the roar of the crowd. In a last frantic effort as he lay on the ground, he flung a handful of sand upward as Sopus bent over him for the death blow.

He was still alive! He was still alive! Even as he rolled away he found time to wonder at it.

The soldier had dropped his shield and was digging vainly into his helmet with the mailed glove of his left hand. The sand had gone into his eyes. Tark, moving with the nimbleness of despair, jumped behind him and gave him a shove: he stepped forward and tripped over his shield, falling with a rattle of armor to the ground.

Tark jumped at him and grabbed his sword, but Sopus grimly hung onto it. The two men wrestled for the sword for an instant, and Tark knew he was no match in strength for the soldier. His own weapon was lying on the sand twenty feet away, but if he tried to get it, his enemy would be able to get to his feet again. Sopus shoved him rolling away, and Tark's flailing hand fell on the arrow that had been shot at the governor. He grabbed it and leaped back at the

blinded warrior, poking the point of the arrow at the opening in the armor at the throat where the helmet met the chestpiece.

He held the arrow firmly in both hands, but as he was about to jab it into Sopus' windpipe he was astonished to hear the soldier scream in terror.

"I give up!" He heard it even over the roar of the crowd. "Shoemaker! Mercy!"

Slowly Tark got to his feet. He couldn't kill the man: he couldn't kill anyone. He was too familiar with the agony of seeing death's inexorable approach; he knew too well how sweet life could be.

Cursing himself for a coward, he stood on the bloody sand as the astonished roar of the crowd swirled about him. Why couldn't he be like his great-grandfather? Why couldn't he be a hero like the mighty Liberator whose name he bore, a hero who could face death joyfully and deal it out with a laugh? But he knew that he was no hero, only an ordinary man.

The trumpets blew again and silence fell over the vast audience in the stands. The governor leaned forward in his chair. "Shoemaker," he said, "you have been visited by the god of luck this day. Your fighting was marred by low and unfair tactics, tactics which are not in accordance with the rules of battle, but we could expect no other behavior from a Lanian. You will not be given another chance; you have forfeited all rights to be treated with decency. Tomorrow morning you will be returned to the arena and burned alive." He stilled the rising murmer of the crowd with a gesture of his hand. "As for you, Sopus, former officer of the armies of Ter, after your disgrace . . ." He broke off.

The soldier, who had been sitting up as if dazed, leaning on one hand, crumpled forward to the ground. Tark looked down at him in amazement: Sopus was unconscious.

Night: the two tiny moons of Lan stood high in the star-specked sky over the sleeping city. Their dim light shone down on the empty streets where here and there a Mauaii sentry walked his lonely rounds. An occasional burst of revelry floated out on the night air from behind the closely shuttered windows and barred doors in the poorer sections of the city where the Lanaii were allowed to live: the people of Lan were jubilant tonight. They would soon be free of their hated overlords. Had not Tark the Liberator returned and won a great victory in the arena? The story, told and retold a thousand times that night, lost nothing

in the telling. In the people's minds rose a single toast: Long life to Tark!

But in one of the houses—

"Death to Tark! Princess, this has gone too far. We were wrong to start it. He must be killed tonight. Any display of his real nature now would set our cause back for years, perhaps destroy it forever. The people's reaction when they found they had been fooled . . . I don't even want to think about it. We had amazing luck this afternoon when he won that fight in the arena."

"All right, Rogar. Go and kill him yourself. Take as many of our supporters as you need."

He bowed, "Now you speak like the true ruler of the people of Lan. He will be dead before the sun rises."

And in the governor's palace—

"Death to Tark!" The governor pounded his fist on the table. "These idiotic Lanaii look on him as some kind of hero. Seems he's descended from that statue in the public square."

"The statue, Lord Governor?"

"Don't be a fool. He's supposed to be some sort of reincarnation of the man that statue represents. The people look on him as their hero. Hero! A skinny weakling." He laughed. "And he wasn't even a good shoemaker."

Obsequiously, his staff laughed with him.

"But I want him killed tomorrow, and I want you to herd as many Lanaii into the stands as possible. He must die slowly, with torture. You understand? It is important that he die as badly as possible. I want his people to see how feeble a hero they have chosen. I intend to break their spirits once and for all." He glared around. "And now to the main point of this meeting. Tark himself is unimportant. My secret police have informed me that some of *you*—don't look surprised, you know I check on you—that some of you have been heard to say that after today's combat you could half believe that the spirit of these people's hero had entered this shoemaker's body." He thumped his fist down. No one dared meet his eyes. "Perhaps you have simply been on this stinking planet too long: perhaps you want to be sent home to Ter, eh? No? Nobody wishes to be sent home in disgrace?" He raised his voice to a shout. "All right then! Put this insane native belief out of your minds! You will see tomorrow how this hero dies."

And in the tiny cell underneath the stands of the arena—

Tark lay shivering on the stone floor. Hunger, fear and the cold kept him miserably awake. With open eyes he stared into the darkness. He had done nothing, nothing at all to deserve this. It didn't matter to him who ruled his world: he was content to obey and be silent. And yet tomorrow . . . because of an accident of birth and a foolish superstition they were going to take him out into the sunlight and burn him alive. And after he was dead the sunlight would continue to come down gently on the rolling fields of Lan, and next week, perhaps, some one else would lie trembling and wretched on the damp stone floor of this cell.

He came uncontrollably to his feet, grabbing the iron bars with his desperate hands, shouting, screaming. "It's me!" he yelled over and over hardly knowing what he was doing. "It's me! Let me go! I never did anything!" He smashed his feet against the base of the door, kicking out frantically as if he wanted to thrust all the force of his body into one panic-stricken last effort to save his life.

Down the corridor a door swung open, blinding him for an instant with the light that poured out from the room behind it. "Shut up there, prisoner. You won't be so eager to get out tomorrow when we come to get you." A soldier stepped into into the passageway. Behind him Tark could see three more guards sitting around a table.

He fell back from the bars, panting in deep breaths as he tried to regain control of himself. It wasn't the soldier who had brought him out of his terror: it was the sight of the girl who had made faces at him. She was serving wine to the guards, and in some corner of his mind Tark was ashamed of showing her his anguished fear of death. Poor crazy girl, she was in some measure a friendly face. The darkness returned ten-fold as the soldier stepped back and slammed the door behind him. Tark shut his eyes and rested his heated forehead against the cool bars, hating himself for a coward. What would the great Liberator have done in such circumstances? He would have lured the soldier into reach and choked the life out of him. He would have wrenched the bars from his cell by brute strength. He would have dug through the wall. He would have done any of a thousand things. He would have killed Sopus when he had a chance. He would never have been captured in the first place. Tark dug his nails into the palms of his hands: he mustn't lose control of himself again.

Slowly he sank to the cold floor of the cell. How much longer did

he have to live? Light glowed in the passageway as the door to the soldiers' guardroom swung open. He clenched his eyes shut bitterly as tight as he could. Was it time?

—Help me, he prayed hopelessly, help me, great grandfather. If you can't give me your spirit and your strength, at least give me your courage to die.

But he felt a terrible shudder of fear as the door of his cell squealed open.

"Tark! Quickly! Your life is in danger."

Opening his eyes in amazement, he jumped to his feet. For a moment he could only wonder that someone would bother to give him such useless information, then his fear-frozen brain began to work again. It wasn't a soldier: it was the crazy girl, the arena servant. "Hurry," she said. "They'll be coming to in a few minutes."

"What? Who? I . . ."

Impatiently, she grabbed him by the arm and yanked him from the cell. "This way. Follow me."

For an instant he couldn't believe his good fortune. His mind, used to continual disappointment, was unable to grasp the fact that he had a chance for life. Instead of renewed hope, he felt only concern for the girl who was leading him down the corridor. Even if she was insane could she unlock his cell door without being punished?

"Wait," he said. "I . . ."

She turned on him with a face contorted in anger. "Shut up," she hissed. "Just follow me." She tiptoed into the guard room, beckoning him to follow.

"But the soldiers—" he whispered.

They were all asleep, sitting stolidly in their chairs. Amazed, he held his breath as he brushed past them and through the far door.

The first faint grey light of dawn lay like a dust powdered on the black velvet night. He could see the girl's dim figure as she flitted ahead of him through the street. Whirling suddenly, she grabbed his arm and pulled him into a doorway. To his amazement, she kissed him. For the first time his new life began to look as if it might be bearable after all.

When she let go he grabbed her and started to kiss her again, but she slapped him so hard he lost his balance in the narrow doorway and fell out into the street.

"Mind your manners," she said. "Come on."

Poor girl, he had forgotten she was crazy.

The twelve men stood outside the arena. Their leader, a burly redheaded man, drew his sword from its scabbard at his side and used the tip of it to draw a map on the

ground.

"Listen," he said. "This is where we are now. Just inside that door there's the guardroom where the soldiers are. There should be four of them and perhaps an arena servant or two. Got that? You eight men are going to take care of the soldiers and anybody else in there. Silently, remember. You three will come with me through the inside door into the passageway under the stands. There's a man in one of the cells. He's a little skinny looking fellow, but don't take any chances with him. Kill him right away. All right?"

"All right, Rogar."

"No blunders now. The princess wants this man dead."

"All right, Rogar."

"And so do I, which is more important. Let's go."

They burst through the door, and the soldiers, waking from their drugged sleep didn't even have time to realize they were dying before they were dead. Rogar and his three followers rushed into the passageway. The door to Tark's cell swung idly open.

The red-headed man fell back one step and leaned against the wall. "Maybe the princess was right. Maybe Tark . . ."

"What did you say, sir?"

"Nothing," he yelled in a furious voice. "Spread out and search this place. I didn't say anything." His face was pale beneath his flaming hair.

The arena was empty.

"Rogar," said one of his men. "Remember when we were coming here, remember that pair of lovers in the doorway? I bet . . ."

"By all the gods!" He slammed his huge fist against the door. "Of course. But who was the woman?" He strode back and forth across the littered guardroom. "All right," he said finally. "You men might as well go home: I won't need you any more for today." He flung a bag of coins to them. "You will be better repaid when the princess comes to her rightful throne."

The men chuckled. They knew who would rule Lan when that happened. Rogar's swordsmen would have rewarding work to do.

"It's morning, Lord Governor."

"I'm awake, Phindus. I was thinking."

"Pleasant thoughts, I trust, Lord Governor."

"This is the day we burn what's-his-name. That hero of your people. Tark! That's him! If you Lanaii had to pick a hero, why did you pick such a puny one?" The governor laughed. "He didn't even have the guts to kill that fool Sopus when he had him down."

"Yes, sir. Your bath is drawn."

"Good. Did any messages come while I was asleep?"

The servant carefully kept the jubilation from his face and voice. "Only one, Lord Governor. The prisoner in the arena killed his four guards last night and escaped. Is the water hot enough for you, sir?" "Tark escaped? Escaped? Tark?" Water splashed.

"Yes, Lord Governor. Tark the Liberator escaped. He has come back to kick you and all your people off our planet. Goodbye, sir." He carefully held the governor's head under water until the bubbles stopped coming up. Then he rolled down his sleeves and walked with slow dignity from the palace.

And gradually the rumor spread.

"Tark killed a dozen soldiers and escaped from the arena."

"Tark tore the iron bars from his cell door and killed a platoon of Mauaii troops."

"Did you hear what Tark did? He killed every soldier in the arena with his bare hands."

"And then he went and killed the governor."

"Tark is driving the Mauaii from Lan!"

"Tark the Liberator!"

"Please," whined Tark, "can't you go a little slower? My feet hurt." He had never walked so far or so fast in his life. The city stretched out across the plains far below them. "Are you still mad because I told you I thought you were crazy?"

The girl glared back at him.

"I couldn't help it," he said. "I was scared and I wasn't thinking clearly. When I saw you making faces at me . . ." Aggrieved, he burst out with a whining shout: "What else could I think? You don't know how it feels to be taken out to die!" He scurried along the trail after her. "And I'm sorry I kissed you. I thought . . ."

She turned and faced him. "What did you think?"

He stepped back a pace, suddenly frightened by the vehemence with which she spoke. "I don't know what I thought. I guess . . . I guess I didn't think of anything . . . It was just that I realized I was going to die and that you were kissing me and . . .it was pleasant, that's all." He scraped at the dusty trail with his foot. "I didn't know you were just trying to keep those people from paying attention to me. I just thought how I liked it. I hardly ever get to kiss a pretty girl . . . Only my landlady when I can't pay the rent on time." He kicked a pebble. "She's fat."

To his surprise the girl was smiling.

"Come on," she said." We've got

to get to the cave by night. There's a lot you have to learn."

"About what?"

"About everything. About the political situation here on Lan. About your great grandfather. About yourself." She turned and started up the trail again. "About women," she said, but he didn't hear her.

He hurried to keep up with her. "I don't even know your name," he said.

"You don't need to know it," she shouted back over her shoulder. "You didn't wonder about it when you thought I was crazy."

"I guess I shouldn't have told you about that," said Tark, "but I have different thoughts about you now. I'd like to know who I'm thinking about when I think about you." He smiled at her. "And I can't think of anything else."

"You're learning fast," she said.

"What?"

"Never mind. My name is Niamala."

"I'm pleased to meet you."

"I should think you would be. You'd be three quarters fried right now if you hadn't."

"Don't think I'm not grateful. That's just something people say when they're introduced."

She groaned softly. "Are you always so conventional?"

"I'm a shoemaker," he said.

"Not any more, you aren't. You're Tark the Liberator now."

He had forgotten about that. "Do I have to be? Can't I just wait where ever it is we're going until this nonsense all blows over?"

Furious, the good mood of the past few minutes forgotten, she whirled around toward him. "Nonsense? What nonsense? Do you still think the Mauaii are fit to rule this planet? Do you think any government that doesn't come from the wishes of the people can be a just one? And do you think any man can stand by and let tyranny walk the same streets he lives on? Open your eyes! Didn't you ever hear that sweet word, democracy?"

He was embarassed by her outburst. It didn't matter to Tark who ruled Lan as long as he was let alone in safe obscurity. More than anything else, he wanted to return to his old life.

She turned forward again and began to walk swiftly away, leaving him to follow her as best he could. "I'm not a politican," he muttered sullenly to himself, "And I'm not a hero and I'm not a fool." He glared angrily at the back of her head.

It would have been different if he had really been taken over by his great-grandfather's spirit, but he knew that nobody on Lan could believe that any more, not after

seeing his terror in the arena yesterday, not after seeing how he had dropped his weapons from sheer clumsiness and fright. He had done everything wrong: he just wasn't going to try any more. He was ready to give up.

"I tell you, I was there. I saw it. They offered him the choice of an easy death or a hard death, and he simply stood there, too proud to speak. And then when the herald brought him the poison he refused to even look at it. I've never seen such dignity in the face of death."

"He fought his way through the palace guards and killed the governor."

"Fought his way? The guards ran in terror when they saw him coming."

"Nobody knows where he is now."

"He's gathering an army. He's preparing a revolution."

"We'll be free again."

"Look! Is that a Mauaii soldier coming toward us?"

"Yes. A corporal. Look at him scowl."

"Lend me your knife. Thank you."

"Good morning, corporal."

"Should we bury him or just leave the body here in the street?"

"Princess, I don't know how he did it. When we got there the soldiers were sitting around their table, sound asleep. Their wine had been drugged. Tark was gone from his cell."

"All right, Rogar. This means simply that we have to change our estimate of Tark. He's no longer a mere pawn in our plans." She drummed her fingers idly on the arm of her chair.

"The things he's done in the last two days . . .well, you might as well admit that a shoemaker couldn't have done them." She held up one hand. "Let me finish, Rogar. I think this Tark can be as useful to us as his great grandfather was: I think he may be able to drive the Mauaii from Lan. Rogar, despite your fine scorn for my female superstition, I feel that there may be something to this belief that the spirit of the Liberator has taken over this man's body."

"I live only to carry out your orders, Princess." He bowed so low she could not see the twisted smile on his face. "Perhaps we have grevіously understimated this man by trying to use him merely as a symbol, someone we could have killed in order to profit by his death. Perhaps the Liberator has returned. Perhaps. But remember this, Princess. The Liberator drove the Mauaii from Lan, but he did not intend to restore your dynasty to

the throne. No— he was about to call for a return to democracy. There are a number of sealed boxes of papers in the archive-room, Princess; I recommend you look through them some time. I haven't read them all myself, but I do know this—your own great-grandfather had the first Tark killed in this very house. The bones are buried under the archive room."

"How was he killed, Rogar? I thought he was invincible."

"I don't know. There's a lot about those days of seventy five years ago that I don't understand. But this Tark who's alive today: we must find him. That's of first importance. If it turns out that he will fight for the return of the dynasty to the throne, all well and good. But if he won't swear his allegiance to you, Princess . . ." He drew his knife. "We have room for more bones in that grave."

"Rogar," she said, "I believe you like to kill."

He smiled. "In your service, Princess."

"All right," she said. "It may be necessary to kill this Tark. In any event, it is necessary to find him and bring him here. Don't underestimate him again, Rogar. Use every man at your command."

The general looked at the worried group around the table. "It is necessary to find this man and bring him here," he said. "It seems the late governor underestimated him. I don't propose to duplicate his mistake: I shall use every man at my command. This Tark is the most important person on Lan. My whole army is ordered to find him and capture him. When we get him here he will be questioned and then executed."

"Your pardon, General," said one of the civilians, "but why is it necessary to question him? I understand he is a dangerous man, a killer. Wouldn't it be best to execute him as soon as he is taken? After all, a man who can do what he did . . . I fear this man, General."

"And so do I, my Lord. But the people of Lan say he is their leader. Now, there is this to consider: there is a vast and surprisingly well organized underground movement here on this planet. Don't smile—I know them to be dangerous. But the situation isn't clear even to my secret police; this underground seems to be split into rival groups, though it hardly seems possible. Tark, when we capture him, can clear up this matter for us, and I'm sure he will, when we apply the proper persuasion. It is important that we clean up this underground before they become too bold. Since this Tark murder-

ed the governor this morning over forty of my soldiers have been cut down in the streets."

The civilians looked grave. "Why wasn't he killed years ago?" one of them asked.

"Because the governor didn't know about him. For years this Tark pretended to be nothing but a shoemaker. Waiting with diabolical cleverness for the time to strike, he sat there in his shop and pretended to be just another weak Lanaian fool. Gentlemen, we must remember that these Lanaii are not the weaklings we have taken them for. Frankly, I consider the situation here on Lan to have grown to alarming proportions, and it all hinges around Tark. There is a belief here on this planet that Tark is the reincarnation of one of their heroes of the past, a certain thug named Tark the Liberator—I hardly need remind you what that means. Seventy five years ago we were forced off this planet by an armed uprising of the people led by this old Tark." He glared around the table at them. "We must kill this man before we are put into danger again."

Like all Mauaii, he tended to shout when he was frightened. He shouted now. "We can't expect reinforcements from our home planet of Ter, not until certain . . . conditions . . . there are rectified. I'm not authorized to explain myself more fully at his time. But gentlemen, remember this: we must capture Tark, we must capture him swiftly, we must force his information from him, and we must put him to death."

He waited until the civilians had all filed from the room, and then he sank into his seat. "If we can," he muttered. Fear of the Liberator still throbbed in a hidden corner of every Mauaii heart, and it began to look as if the belief that the Liberator had returned in this new body might not be so foolish after all. He flipped through the sheaf of morning reports. They told him of ambush and sabotage against the Mauaii rulers of Lan. He began to realize how skilfully Tark had planned for this day. It was only occasional raiding now, but it would soon grow into open revolution unless Tark were captured.

"Lieutenant, can I wear full armor on guard duty this evening?"

"You know the uniform of the day, soldier. Light armor only."

"Yes, sir, But . . ."

"But what?"

"Sir, I'm afraid I'll need full armor. Three of the men in my platoon were killed today."

"Three? I was given only two names on the list."

"The other one was just now, sir.

Tark came into the barracks when nobody was looking and strangled the Master-at-Arms. We found his body when we came back from chow."

"Tark!"

"Yes, sir. Can I wear full armor?"

"All right, soldier. I suppose so."

"Sir?"

"What is it?"

"Do you think we'll ever see Ter again?"

"I just can't go any further," he whimpered. "Do you realize I haven't eaten anything in two days?"

She ignored him and kept on up the steep path.

Tark miserably followed her. Would he ever see his little cobbler's shop again? The setting sun cast its long shadow across the foothills, and he was able to look back far into the distance and see the city they had left, with the streets radiating from the central square. He was also able to see the huge statue of Tark the Liberator standing in the square, and the sight made him feel even more weak and useless than before. He couldn't come up to his great grandfather's standards no matter how hard he tried, so there was no sense in trying any more. He glared at the girl with a feeling close to hatred: he hated every Lanaian right now, everyone who had forced him into this sudden unbelieved and unwanted prominence as a leader of his people. No. He didn't owe them anything. He didn't want freedom or glory or anything else except obscurity and a good meal.

And in some corner of his mind he told himself that the Mauaii would let him alone if they only knew how he felt.

Misery, fear, and self-pity: the seeds of betrayal grew in Tark's brain.

The girl stopped. "Here we are," she said. Putting a small whistle to her mouth, she blew three times. Etched darkly against the skyline, a man appeared on the ridge opposite them and waved his arm. "All clear," she said, "come on." He followed her as she pushed off the path into the thick trees. Down into a gully, up the other side, across a stream, panting up the side of the ridge, Tark went after her.

"Phindus," she cried, as she came up to the man who had waved. "What are you doing here?"

"Niamala!"

Tark felt a deep and unexpected pang of jealousy as he saw her throw her arms around the man. "I didn't expect to see you here," she said, "but I'm glad you are. We've got to act fast. Are the others inside?"

"We're all here," he said. "Come on. Who's this you brought?"

She looked back proudly. "It's Tark himself."

"Tark!" Phindus went sliding down the hill to where Tark was sullenly standing. "Tark!" He grabbed him by the hand and pumped it up and down wildly. "I heard about how you escaped from the arena last night. Wonderful!" He began to pull him uphill. "I was the governor's servant, Tark. Tark—I can't believe it's you at last! When I heard how you killed the four soldiers guarding you I knew the time had come. I drowned the governor in his own bathtub and came up here." He laughed delightedly. "We've been getting reports from the city all day. "They think you killed him. It's wonderful, Tark, the Mauaii are getting scared. Now that you're here we can really begin to work on them. Tark, Tark, the underground has waited seventy five years for this day, waiting for you to come back."

Niamala smiled fondly at him. "Phindus," she said, "don't you ever stop talking?"

He laughed again. "If you know how I had to keep silent as that governor's servant you'd realize what a relief it is now to be able to open my mouth as a freeman. And Tark! We've got Tark with us!" He was almost dancing with joy as he pushed aside a clump of bushes.

"What's this about killing the guards?" Tark asked. The sight of Phindus' joy made him angry, and he didn't know why: he'd never been jealous before. "We didn't kill any guards."

"We? Through here. Watch out for the thorns."

"Niamala and I. She gave them something in their wine to put them to sleep, but they were all right when we left."

"I saw some of Rogar's men heading for the arena," she said. "Tark and I . . .hid from them . . . They must have done it."

Tark was pleased to see her momentary embarrassment: at least he had kissed her, even if he had been slapped. "We pretended to be lovers," he told Phindus, and he was pleased to see Niamala blush.

"Well," she said angrily, "we all have to make sacrifices if we want to be free."

"Here we are," said Phindus. "Watch your head."

It was a mere crack in the limestone rocks, one crack among thousands on the mountainside. Just wide enough to admit one man at a time, it was admirably situated for defense. A young man was on guard inside, and Tark was surprised to see the joy in his eyes as he saw

them come in. The sentry turned and shouted into the echoing darkness of the vast cavern that opened up behind him.

"She's brought him! Tark's here!"

Tark stepped back in astonishment as the cave lit up: he had never seen electric lights before.

"Surprised?" asked Phindus, "One of the Mauaii technicians escaped and set this up for us. It's just one of the things those people are keeping from us. But now that you're here that's going to be changed."

Tark couldn't bring himself to be friendly to the man. He merely grunted. This constant harping on his importance and usefulness was getting on his nerves. "Do you have something to eat?" he asked. "I'm hungry."

Phindus looked downcast. "Nobody thought of bringing food up here. We can send for some, though, and it'll be here by morning." He slapped Tark on the back. "But we've got news that'll make you so happy you won't want to bother with eating. The people are rising up all over Lan: all they were waiting for was the Liberator's return. Tark, you've got the Mauaii scared."

"I haven't eaten for two days," Tark said.

The general threw down his napkin. He wasn't hungry. None of the dignitaries around the table had made more than a pretence of eating. Who could be sure that Tark or one of the his men hadn't sneaked into the kitchen and poisoned the food? Everyone knew how subtle and dangerous he was. Less than an hour ago three Mauaii nobles, on their way to this very banquet, had been cut down in the street by a man dressed to look like a sailor: Tark, no doubt. The man, a huge fellow, had swaggered up to the nobles, rolling from side to side as if he were drunk, had grabbed all three of them, and cut their throats. The fools of the police who had chased him reported that he had taken flight on a ship. This was nonsense, of course: hadn't Tark, not half an hour later, been seen (this time disguised as a woodchopper) crushing the skull of a Mauaii soldier?

They saw Tark behind every curtain, behind every tree, behind every knife. The bitter and half-repressed memory of their defeat of seventy five years before had driven the Mauaii to excesses of cruelty, and this cruelty led them to fear vengeance. They would fight bravely to save their necks and their domination over the people of Lan, but how could they fight this avenger who struck them down without warning in a hundred

different forms—how, for that matter, could they fight the whole planet if the whole people were to rise against them?

No, they weren't hungry.

"I can't eat, Rogar. I just can't. I'm too worried. Here we are at a crucial moment in history and we can't find the most important man in it anywhere. If we have Tark on our side we can't lose. If we find he's against us and we're able to kill him, we can blame his death on the Mauaii and again we can't lose. But without Tark this rebellion will just fizzle out. Rogar, the dynasty can't wait another seventy five years for his return. Why can't you catch him, Rogar? According to the reports I get he's out in the city someplace."

"The problem is to find him, Princess. He struck first in the governor's palace when he drowned the governor; then he stabbed a corporal in a street on the other side of town; then he ambushed two soldiers down by the main square; then he killed another soldier in the army barracks . . . you see? He keeps moving. He's a clever man, Princess. But I have all my men out looking for him. We'll have him by dawn, I promise you."

"Listen, what say after supper we get some of the boys together and go hunt us up a couple of Mauaii soldiers? We can borrow your wife's carving knife for the first one, and after that we'll have a sword."

"I don't see why not. I've always wanted to take a crack at one of those guys. I hear Tark's been knocking them off all day. I only hope he left some for us."

"Let's go now. Who wants to eat on a day like this?"

Full of self-pity, Tark sat at the head of the conference table and watched the room fill up with people. He had never gone so long without food, and now the nervous reaction from the terror he had undergone, combined with the exhaustion of the day-long climb, made him touchy and irritable. Why were they taking advantage of him? He glared at Phindus and Niamala, who were sitting happily together on the other side of the room. Why couldn't they simply leave him alone? He saw her smile at Phindus, and he knew he hated them: he hated them all. And especially he hated her.

Poor Tark, he had never been in love before.

His sandals had been ruined by the climb, and he had no tools to repair them, but he turned them over and over in his hands, appraising them with an expert eye. This return to his old trade helped calm

him somewhat, but nevertheless he jumped slightly when someone beside him stood up and began to speak.

"I assume we're all here. Well, Tark is here too." A wave of applause burst over him, and he hurried to get his sandals back on his feet.

"This is the day we've all been waiting for. Tomorrow we strike at the Mauaii, and with Tark on our side, we can't lose." He held up his hand to stop the cheering. "Niamala brought him to us, so I'm going to let Niamala speak."

Tark wasn't impressed. He had been cheered before, and by a lot more people, and what had it got him? Nearly killed, that's what. He sulked. He was unhappy, hurt, and angry.

The girl was on her feet. "As you know," she said, "I was employed as an arena servant. This was always a useful position, since I was able to overhear all the soldier gossip of the guards, and occasionally help a prisoner, but we never knew how useful it would be. Well! Our first effort to free Tark failed: one of our girls tried to bribe one of the soldiers, but she wasn't able to. We knew that Tark was to fight Sopus, and we knew that Sopus would be fully armed and protected, while Tark would be given only symbolic weapons. We feared that even Tark wouldn't be able to overcome these odds, so I was supplied with a drug to give to the soldier." She laughed lightly. "I brought Sopus a goblet of wine with some of the drug in it, and I tried to let Tark know I was helping him: I couldn't talk while Sopus was there, so I made faces. He thought I was crazy."

Why did she have to bring that up? He hated her all the more.

"As it turned out, of course, Tark won without any of our help — we might have known he would. The drug knocked Sopus out, but not until the fight was over. Everybody thought he had fainted as a result of being stripped of his rank and Mauaii citizenship. Well! That night I managed to put some of the drug in the wine of the four guards who were watching Tark, and we slipped out as soon as they were unconscious." She turned to Phindus. "Phindus tells me they were killed later on. As we left the arena we saw Rogar with a crowd of his killers approaching. They must have done it."

Tark was surprised at the excitement this information caused. "Rogar!" someone said. "Then the princess must be in this, too. We have to work fast, or we'll lose everything."

"Yes," she said. "We have to fight both the Mauaii and Rogar's

supporters: he's really the power behind the princess. We . . ." She broke off as a messenger handed her a note. She glanced at it. "Ramfis is ready to speak to us," she said, and there was a pleased murmer from the crowd. "Ramfis is our historian," she told Tark. "When yet a boy he fought along side of your great-grandfather.

An old man was walking wearily to the head of the table, and when he looked at Tark, Tark felt for a moment that he had seen the eyes of wisdom and truth, but he brushed the feeling aside angrily: he was determined to sulk. There was no sense in getting mystical about things.

He was surprised to find that the old man stopped in front of him and was staring intently. "It is true," Ramfis said. Then, turning to the eager crowd that filled the room, he said it again. "It is true. I fought beside the Liberator, and I knew him well. I have looked into this man's eyes and I have seen the Liberator's spirit in them." He said it quietly, almost as if it were the most commonplace bit of information. "Tark the Liberator has come back to us." And then, surprisingly, he turned back again to Tark and shook his arm lightly. "It *is* true," he whispered. "Remember that. The Liberator's spirit is in you."

Tark slumped in his seat, disgusted: he knew how much that information was worth.

This gang of lunatics might be fooled by this old fake, but Tark wasn't. What right had they to bring him up here? He folded his arms and leaned back in the seat. If they expected him to help them they were mistaken. The Liberator's spirit! Was everybody on the planet blind? Couldn't they see that he was just a plain man? A man who was hungry and tired and nervous? All right, he thought, I'll get away from these fools as soon as I can and go back to the city. He glared at Niamala and Phindus, who were listening intently to the old historian.

" . . . and when the people of Lan rallied around Tark, the Liberator what could the Mauaii do to withstand them? What can an occupying army of tyrants do against a whole planet of men who are fighting to be free? I was there. I fought. There were no great battles, only a knife in the public square, a scuffle in the alley. When the Mauaii shut themselves up in their fortresses and camps, how could they rule? When they came out, how could they live? It was not simply Tark, it was the whole world of Lan that defeated them, sent them fleeing to their space ships. And so Lan was free again."

The audience sat in silence.

"But Lan failed to stay free. We know why. We are not a warrior people, and we had no knowledge of what revolution meant. Lan is a world without history. Unlike Ter, the world of the Mauaii, we have always been one people, one political unit. On Ter there have been numbers of nations, each fighting against the other, and this continual lunatic battling trained them in the tactics of power. On Lan, however, after our earliest kings had subdued the barbarian tribes of the islands, there had been no fighting until the Mauaii came. The kings, themselves, had gradually given way to the Lanaian democracy, and we were a world at peace."

Tark slumped in his chair. He yawned. Would it be possible for him to escape from here tonight?

"And then the Mauaii came, and after years of oppression, Tark the Liberator rallied the people of Lan and the Mauaii fled in terror. Then our troubles began. The kings, the former rulers of Lan, having seen the Mauaii tyranny, thought it would be possible to restore themselves to the empty throne and rule again. You know the result. When the Mauaii came back they found us a people divided, and they put a cruel yoke on our backs. And they found us without our leader." His voice sank. "Tark, my friend Tark, had disappeared: he has never been seen since. But gradually the belief grew up among us that he would come back in the hour of our need, that his spirit, after the great cycle of seventy five years had passed, would re-enter the body of his descendant. I need hardly remind you how we watched over this man here," he pointed at Tark, "how we planned for this day. And I have seen Tark's spirit in his descendants eyes."

The general paced eagerly up and down the huge room. His aides clustered around him. "All right, gentlemen," he said. "I want two regiments ready to move out in half an hour. One of my scouts has just brought word that he's located the main headquarters of the underground: they've had messengers coming up from the city all day, and he managed to follow one. I hardly need remind you what this means. Once we capture the heads of this movement, the rest will crumble away. We might even get Tark! I want you to give orders to kill him on sight: we no longer need information from him. Ten thousand *shofars* to the man who cuts his throat. Light armor, gentlemen, we have some climbing to do. They're in a limestone cavern up

in the hills."

"But two days ago Tark himself took a hand. He led a crowd into the central square and began putting pressure on the Mauaii: the first movement of the revolution was under way. We knew then that the Liberator had returned. He let himself be captured. That puzzled us at first but his capture roused the people of Lan as no other act could and his victory in the arena —which we needlessly tried to make certain of by drugging Sopus—was the spur to any laggards who might be left. Niamala helped Tark escape last night and brought him to us. On the way, they passed Rogar and a gang of his men heading for the arena . . ."

But at this point, worn out, Tark fell asleep: he had heard enough nonsense for the evening.

Gradually the night wore on. The two moons of Lan moved slowly across the sky, tiny gems of brilliance. Ter, the green planet, sank on the western horizon. An occasional Mauaii, out late and alone, paid for his stupidity with his life. A long file of soldiers slowly moved up the foothills toward a cave in the limestone cliffs.

When Tark woke up he thought he was sick. There was a dull throbbing pain in his belly and his legs were sore and aching. But he couldn't afford to be sick: he had a lot of work to finish, at least thirty pair of shoes were piled up in the back of his shop. But where was he? His own bed was never this soft. And then he recognized the pain as hunger, the ache as weariness from yesterday's climb.

Tears of self-pity sprang to his eyes. Nobody had ever been treated so badly. Nobody had ever gone without food for so long. A streak of light showed him where the door was. The Mauaii would forgive him. the Mauaii would know he wasn't against them if he could only go to the city and give himself up to them. They would smile at him and feed him and let him go back to his shop if there was anything left of it after this much time without protection. See? he would say, I'm not against you. I'm not against anybody. And they're a lot of people in a cave up there who are . . .

The Mauaii wouldn't be too hard on these poor fools, not if they caught them all. He got out of bed, fumbled for his sandals, and went slowly to the door. New clothes lay on a chair just inside it. He put them on and opened the door a crack. Nobody. Stepping into the hall, he blinked against the unfamiliar brightness of the electric lights. What had they said?—

something about a Mauaii technician who escaped and set them up. It was all very mysterious, but when you're hungry you don't think about much except the state of your stomach. The large room where they had brought him first was at the end of the hall. He crossed it, his sandals hissing softly as he shuffled on the limestone floor.

He felt a sudden explosion of fright in his chest when the sentry at the entrance of the cave snapped to attention: he hadn't thought about him, and the man's motion brought all his old terror back into being. Even in the partial darkness of the cave mouth he could see the sentry's eyes glitter with excitement. "Tark," the sentry—he was hardly more than a boy—said, "is it true you're going to lead us against the Mauaii tomorrow?"

Tark was ashamed of himself for a moment. "Partly true," he said. He pushed by the sentry. "I'm going out to look around." He started down the ridge, and then, driven by emotions he couldn't analyze, he returned to the cave. "Why don't you have any food up here?" he asked.

The boy grinned. "All your fault," he said. "When you started that mob going the other day we knew the time was near when we'd come down from here to help you, so we moved all our supplies into the city. Getting rid of the Mauaii is more important than eating for a day or so."

"Um," said Tark, and started off into the darkness. He had a long walk in front of him. It was too bad a boy like that had to be caught along with the others, but that was the way things were. It wasn't his fault. It was the fault of those other people who stirred up all this trouble: that crazy old historian, Ramfis; people like him. Phindus. All the others . . . Niamala. He didn't want to think about her.

So he thought of nothing else as he slid down the hill. He lost the trail once, and wandered for almost an hour before he came back to it again. That was why the Mauaii didn't find him.

It was dawn when he reached the city, and he hurried toward his room. Maybe his landlady would have breakfast ready. Already, at this early hour, the streets were full of people. He wondered why. As he passed a bakery shop and smelled the fresh bread cooking, he wondered if he would faint from starvation before he got home. He began to run as he neared the familiar street. That was why Rogar found him.

"Shoemaker! Wait a minute." A hand grabbed his arm.

He recognized the red-headed man who had stirred up the crowd,

and he tried to shake himself free. "You aren't getting me into any more trouble," he yelled. "I'm going home."

"Of course you are. Just get into the cart here and my men will drive you."

Tark looked at the five grinning fighters who stood around him, their hands on the hilts of their swords.

"Don't make any mistake about it," Rogar said. "My men will kill you the instant you make a false move."

"Doesn't anybody understand," Tark whined, "all I want to do is go home and be left in peace. Everybody picks on me. Everybody acts as if I were some sort of hero. Look at me," he yelled. "Do I look like a hero? Do I look like the kind of man who gives a damn who rules Lan? Why do you think I left your cave? And now you come with your killers to drag me back. It isn't fair."

"Get in the cart," Rogar said. "You're not fooling anybody with that innocent act. Not after yesterday. We've been looking for you, Tark, and we've been all over the city, and everywhere we've been we've found dead Mauaii. Tark, you're the most effective killer on Lan, and we're not going to take any chances with you. Get in the cart or we'll cut you down."

Tark got into the cart. Was everybody crazy?

"We need you, Tark. We'll pay you well. Anything you want. Anything. You can be governor of any province on Lan. All we want you to do is to stop this aimless fighting against the Mauaii and start fighting to more purpose: fight to restore the princess to the throne of Lan."

"Princess? Niamala . . . is she a princess?" He wasn't surprised. Hadn't somebody mentioned the princess back in the cave? The girl's features rose in front of his eyes and he tried to hate her.

"Niamala?" Rogar looked at him narrowly. "Who's Niamala? I'm talking about the princess of the great dynasty of the House of Lan."

"Oh," said Tark. It didn't seem important. He couldn't think of anything but the girl. Creaking, the cart moved through the narrow streets. "Aren't you from Niamala?" he asked finally. "This isn't the way to the cave."

Rogar didn't answer. He had no idea of what Tark was talking about, and that worried him. What was Tark trying to do? He eyed him closely as they sat side by side in the cart: you'd never think such a puny looking little man could have done everything Tark had carried off in the last

two days. There was something unnatural about it. And he wasn't even carrying a weapon. It was that incomprehensible gap between Tark's meek appearance and his bloody actions that sent the chills up and down Rogar's spine as he sat in the early morning sunlight.

Tark was afraid, too; but, unlike Rogar, he admitted his fear to himself. He didn't know who these people were, but they were obviously not from the cave—Niamala and her friends hadn't threatened him with death every time he opened his mouth. Nor were they Mauaii, that was obvious from the way the cart hugged the side streets and from the way the red-headed man had urged him to continue his fight (what fight? Tark wondered) against them. Whoever they were, they weren't friends of his: that much was obvious. But it seemed to Tark that he was getting used to fear: it no longer filled him with wild and useless panic—or maybe he was simply so hungry that nothing else bothered him as much.

Tark didn't know, of course, that all of his actions all his life had been dominated by fear: fear of the Mauaii, fear of insecurity, fear of what his name would bring him. He didn't know that he longed for obscurity, for peace, for death as the end of fear; and he didn't know that it was his knowledge that he could never live up to his great grandfather's mighty deeds that made him afraid in the first place; tested in action, he knew he would fail, and he feared failure because it would make him know himself at last. Who does not fear self-knowledge? When such a man appears he brings liberation with him: he is a free man.

It was this fear of failure in action that had driven Tark from his only friends in the cave, driven him down to the city to give himself up to the Mauaii.

The cart moved faster as it had to cross one of the main avenues radiating from the public square, and Tark, looking down the wide street, saw the mighty statue of his ancestor and, further down the avenue, the governor's palace.

Without even thinking about what he did, he leaped to his feet, jumped from the cart over the heads of the surprised guards, and was fleeing down the avenue as fast as he could go. His feet pounded a desperate tattoo on the cobblestones as he ran, his breath came in jagged spurts. Shouts behind him made him run faster; he ran in a nightmare of confused misery. He had to get to the palace. The Mauaii would save him.

Panting, he rushed into the main square, and he pushed his way

frantically through the dense crowd gathered there. Heedless of the angry glances his rudeness earned him, he shoved and wriggled his way to the other side.

Two of Rogar's men were there, grinning at him. He was cut off. They had hurried around the edges of the square where the crowd was less dense. Whirling, Tark rushed back into the mass of people. He was comparatively safe as long as he stayed with the others; not even Rogar would dare lay hands on him there.

But he couldn't stay in the crowd forever. He was hungry and dirty and hot and miserable. He sat down wretchedly under the mighty statue of his ancestor and put his head in his hands. The bright jubilation of the people around him made him feel even worse, and he listened sullenly to their talk.

" . . . killed three nobles on the way to the general's feast."

"And then he . . . disguised as a sailor . . . as a woodcutter . . . the Mauaii are terrified . . . as a beggar . . . as a blind man . . . even disguised as a child . . . saw him kill six soldiers and chase the others . . "

Tark groaned: this bashing over of his ancestor's mighty feats didn't do any good.

"And in the arena he . . ."

Amazed, he leaped to his feet. They were talking about him! ". . . saw him, too. I was there . . . wouldn't believe it unless . . . with my own eyes . . . wonderful What a fighter! He threw away his sword and shield. I tell you he threw down his fighting equipment and attacked that fully armed soldier with his bare hands! And beat him, too. He wanted to show us that our strength is not only in weapons, he wanted to show us that we have to use our brains. Yes, and when he got that soldier down he wouldn't even kill him. I saw it! And then he killed all four of the soldiers guarding him to show us he could do that, too. Was there ever such a fighting man? All day yesterday and all night he's being prowling the city here, killing Mauaii. Sometimes he's alone and sometimes he's leading other people." The man was looking right at Tark. "I saw him with my own eyes," he yelled. "As clearly as I see you."

"What does he look like?" somebody asked.

"Like that!" the man flung his arm up and pointed to the statue that loomed over them.

Despite himself, Tark burst out laughing. It was amazing how hard it was for some people to see the truth. "He looks like that statue?" Tark asked.

"You want a punch on the nose?" the man shouted. "You calling me a liar?" He shoved Tark angrily to the ground.

"Leave the little guy alone," somebody said. "If you want to fight so bad why don't you fight the Mauaii?"

"By all the gods! I'll fight the Mauaii and then I'll fight you and then I'll come back and fight this guy that laughs at the Liberator!" The keyed-up crowd roared approval.

"Let's all go," somebody yelled. "Tear up the benches and make clubs."

Forgotten, Tark lay on the ground where he had been shoved. Somebody picked him up and gently dusted him off. "Thank you," said Tark.

"Not at all," Rogar said. "Come along or I'll kill you." He jabbed the point of a dagger into Tark's ribs. "You're a dangerous man, Tark. We're not going to take any chances with you."

So Rogar wasn't able to see the truth either.

It suddenly struck Tark that he, himself, might be as blind as the rest of them; but he didn't see how that could be. The whole thing seemed to base on the false belief that his great-grandfather's spirit had entered into his body, making him a hero, and he knew that it certainly hadn't. No, he decided, he was the only man who wasn't deluding himself.

Still, the knowledge that almost everyone on the planet of Lan seemed afraid of him made him hold his head high as he was matched captive through the streets by Rogar's men. He was shoved into the entrance of a large building in a poorer section of the city.

"Up these stairs, Tark."

If only he could get to the Mauaii with all the information he had picked up, not only about those poor lunatics in the cave, but about Rogar and his band of killers.

He smiled again, thinking of his own new reputation as a killer. Turning suddenly on the steps, he said "Boo!" to one of the men following him: the guard grabbed frantically for his sword, stepped back a pace, and toppled head over heels down the stairway.

Rogar laughed. "We need you, Tark," he said. "You can name your price," Looking back, Tark saw that the guard he had frightened was lying motionless at the foot of the stairs, his neck bent at an impossible angle.

"In here." Rogar held back a curtain and followed Tark into the room. "Princess, here's our man."

"Good," she said. "Tark, we heard about what you've accomplished since you escaped from the

arena. We . . ."

Rozer interrupted her. "You haven't heard his latest feat. He killed one of my men just by shouting at him. He timed it so the fellow would fall down the steps and break his neck."

Tark was embarrassed: he had not meant to hurt the man. He was not the kind of person to whom killing was a joke. But, still, if he had such a fierce reputation as he seemed to have . . . he dismissed the thought: it would lead him to action, and he feared action because he feared failure and the self knowledge it would bring him.

"Well, Tark," the princess was saying, "are you for us or against us?"

He came back with a start. He hadn't been listening.

"You have to decide," she said. "There may never come a time again when the Mauaii are so weak. We have information that there is a revolt on their home planet: they can't be reinforced here. The people of Lan are ripe, too. All it needs is your name to stir them up. Tark, throw in with us."

Rogar strode forward. "What do you want, Tark? Power? We can give it to you. Fighting? All you want. Riches? Half the planet is yours. Anything a man can desire is waiting for you: reach out your hand."

Tark smiled, despite himself. What would he do with power? Fighting terrified him. Riches would be nice, but he wanted breakfast much more. "Well," he said, "I'd like my cobbler shop back, and I'd like something to eat. Mainly I'd like to be let alone."

"Listen!" Rogar yelled. "You aren't fooling anybody. We know you've been fighting the Mauaii: do you think we're fools? If you agree to fight them on our side, all right! If you don't . . ." He drew his dagger. "And you needn't try to fight your way out. I have enough men in here to overcome you and your ancestor both! Listen! Do you know we killed him here in this room? And we can kill you, too."

"Rogar!" the princess snapped, and he fell silent, panting with anger.

"We didn't mean to tell you of that," she said, "but I suppose it's just as well. Our ancestors had him killed right here. Do you know what he was planning to do? He was going to turn the government of Lan over to the rabble. He was going to bypass the great dynasty of Lan—can you imagine that? He was going to let the planet be run by butchers and porters and sailors and . . ."

"And shoemakers," Tark said softly. He was surprised at his

sudden anger: he remembered Niamala turning on him, asking him furiously if he didn't care anything about democracy. So these were the heirs of the people who had murdered the Liberator.

—All right, he thought, when I get to the Mauaii I won't tell them anything about those poor fools in the cave; I'll tell them about this house and the people in it. They deserve to be caught.

"We'll give you an hour to think it over," Rogar said. "Either you're with us or against us. Be with us and we'll give you power: be against us and we'll give you death."

The princess stood up. "I'll admit it frankly," she said. "We're afraid of you, Tark. If you won't join us we'll have to kill you. I'm sure you know enough about the mechanics of power to understand that. Your name is of great value as a symbol to the people. For every Mauaii you killed yesterday the people will be inspired to kill a hundred tomorrow. Think it over thoroughly, Tark. We offer you everything a man can want."

—Everything except freedom to live my own life, Tark thought. And you didn't offer me breakfast, either. He watched them silently as they went out the door. It locked with a loud clashing of metal.

He didn't know anything about the mechanics of power, but he was learning. If power gave people the ability to push others around, then something was wrong somewhere. The Mauaii were cruel overlords, but he could see that Rogar and the princess would be no better. It wasn't simply the Mauaii he had to fight: it was everybody who wanted domination over other people.

He sat down glumly. What was this nonsense he was thinking? He didn't want to fight anybody.

It might have been different if his great grandfather's spirit had really returned; then he might have gone and led the people of Lan to freedom, but what could a weak, frightened, and hungry man do? He was no hero, no killer. He was a disgrace to his ancestor's name.

"What will we do with him, Rogar?"

"Put him to death, Princess. He's a killer. We can't trust him. You saw how he acted, pretending to be a weakling. Tark's playing a shrewd game, and we can't afford to give him a chance to get ahead of us. We simply can't trust him. If we had some hold on him, some way of making sure he wouldn't betray us after the Mauaii have been eliminated . . ." He paced up and down angrily. "I'll admit it frank-

ly," he said, "I'm afraid of that man. The way he looks, puny, insignificant—and then the way he kills and kills. I'm a cold-blooded man, Princess, but I've never seen anything as terrible as the way he killed that guard coming up the steps. Tark simply turned around and said *boo*, and frightened him into falling downstairs and breaking his neck."

"Perhaps it was an accident, Rogar. Maybe he meant to frighten the man."

Princess, this man is *Tark!* He doesn't play practical jokes. He wanted to show me his powers. I could have killed the guard myself if I had been in Tark's shoes, but I would have grabbed him and thrown him over the railing: can't you see how deadly a fighting man Tark must be if his timing in action is so good that he can estimate the exact second the man would have been off balance? But I can't see *why* he did it. I thought he was trying to show me this skill as a fighter in order to be in a better position to bargain with us, but he didn't bargain at all. No, Princess, we can't come to terms with him. Unless we can find some way to tie him to our interests I'm afraid we'll have to kill him." He toyed with the handle of his dagger. "My family has been in the service of your dynasty for centuries, Princess: we killed Tark the Liberator once, and we can do it again."

"Do it, Rogar," she hissed. "Kill him now and we'll blame it on the Mauaii." Her eyes were slits of cold flame. "Kill Tark, Rogar."

He strode to the door. "Guards," he shouted.

She struggled angrily in their brawny hands. "Let me go," she said. "You don't have to shove me. I want to go where you're taking me, don't you understand that?"

"In here," one of them said. They pushed Niamala into the building. "Your lover-boy's upstairs if Rogar hasn't killed him yet." The guard laughed. "Won't I do?"

"Where is he? Take me to him." Her nails left a series of red streaks down the guard's face, and he drew back his fist in fury. "You asked for it," he yelled. "You can't . . ."

"Guards!" The commanding voice from the top of the stairs froze him instantly in his place. "Come up here. Bring your swords. We have work to do. On the double."

"Rogar!" Niamala shook herself free from the man holding her. "Rogar, I want to speak to you."

"Who's that?" He came to the head of the steps and glared down.

"Never mind who I am. I came

to tell you to release Tark."

His harsh laughter reverberated through the house.

"Release him!" he shouted. 'I'm just about to release him from everything. How did you know he was here? No matter." He waited while his men filled the hall. "Two of you dig a couple of graves in the floor of the archive room. We're going to kill Tark and I don't want any delay in hiding the body. Wait a minute. Take that girl with you. Make sure she's dead before you bury her. All right. The rest of you come up here. Tark's no use to us if he won't fight on our side. We're going to . . ." He broke off and then was running down the steps two at a time, his boots clattering across the hall as he moved swiftly to where Niamala was struggling with the two guards who were pulling her out of the large room. Grabbing her by the arms, he shook her furiously. "Who are you? What are you to Tark? By the gods, you'll be dead in two minutes if you don't answer me. How do you know my name? Who are you?"

Pulling a pin from her hair, she thrust frantically at his eyes with it, but he ducked and the guards grabbed her again.

"Who brought her in? Who found this woman?"

"I did, Rogar." Holding his neck-cloth over his scratched face one of the men stepped forward. "I was on watch outside the building when I saw her prowling around the back. She told me right off that she knew we had Tark inside. So I brought her in. I didn't figure you wanted anybody to know where he was. I . . ."

"All right," Rogar waved him to silence.

"I came for two things, Rogar."

"So you can talk."

"I can do more than talk," she said, shaking herself loose from the grip of the two men. "I can break this rotten conspiracy of yours wide open if you don't let Tark go. My friends are all around this house."

"Your friends? Do you think the Mauaii could come within a mile of this place without my knowledge?"

"The Mauaii! Rogar, don't you know who the people were who rose behind Tark seventy-five years ago when he chased the Mauaii from Lan?" She stepped forward. "Listen, Rogar. I represent the underground organization of people who want freedom and democracy. Freedom from the Mauaii and freedom from that worn out dynasty you're working for."

He laughed again. "Don't fool me, girl. I know how much difficulty my own organization had in

existing since the Mauaii returned: are you trying to tell me that a bunch of undisciplined fools could . . ."

"If you think that free men can be less brave or less determined than the followers of tyrants, Rogar, you're wrong. We existed. We exist. If Tark and I don't leave this house together in less than ten minutes my friends will tear it down over your thick head."

"Excellent!" Rogar said. "I like a good bluff. He seated himself on the lower step. "Suppose we wait for ten minutes and see what happens."

Niamala felt a flutter of dismay in her heart. It was a weak bluff at best, but what else could she have done once she found herself helpless inside the fortified house? First Tark's disappearance in the middle of the night had driven her hopelessly from the cave in search of him, and then the sight of the Mauaii batallion attacking the cave entrance she had just left had come as a great shock. Most of the underground would escape by the prepared passageways in the tunneled limestone, but she knew that many of them would be captured on their way to the meeting place in the city.

So with misery in her heart she had come down the mountain.

As soon as she heard the description of the small man who had been taken off by Rogar and his armed guards, she knew where Tark would be found. The people who told her, or course, didn't know it was Tark they had seen, but she recognized him from their description. Frantically, she had rushed off to look at Tark's prison, rushed off without making any plan for her safety or Tark's rescue, and now she found herself helpless, a captive in Rogar's hands.

Miserably, she sat beside Rogar while the minutes passed.

"Well?" he said finally. "Are you ready to talk now? Your bluff didn't work."

She shook her head sullenly, determined not to make things worse by talking.

"You came here to save Tark, didn't you? All right. You know we have him upstairs in this building. You know we were about to kill him when you came in. Listen to me. The only thing that can save Tark now is for him to join us."

"He'll never join you," she burst out.

"Perhaps he will." He looked at her. "Niamala, what makes you so sure he won't?"

"Because he . . . how did you know my name?"

Rogar grinned fiercely at her. "I didn't. When we captured Tark this morning he asked if we were

from Niamala. You mean something to him, don't you? Maybe if we let him know we hold you as a hostage . . ." He didn't bother to finish the sentence. "Let's see how he takes it." He stood up and pulled her to her feet. "Guards! You ten stand behind me with your swords ready. If Tark tries to make any trouble, cut him down. All right. Let's go."

They went up the great curving staircase and stood outside the heavy wooden door. Rogar unlocked the massive chains and slipped the door open. "Tark," he said softly, "we've brought you something. I have reason to think you value it highly."

"Breakfast?" said a weary voice from the dark room. Tark couldn't think of anything he wanted more.

"Don't give in to them, Tark," Niamala shouted suddenly.

"Who's that?" he called, springing to his feet. The light in the hall dazzled him.

Rogar shoved her inside the room.

"Niamala?" Tark moved towards her, forgetting his hunger and his fear and his weariness. Value it highly! Rogar's sneer had opened Tark's eyes. It wasn't hatred that had glowed in his chest whenever he thought of her: it was love. He moved almost happily through the room of death and held her gently while he looked into her eyes. How could he have been so wrong? It seemed to him that everybody on Lan was moving through a fog of delusion, and that only love could make the fog lift to show the clear landscape of truth. Poor Tark — he had learned part of the truth and he thought he knew it all. He was just about to kiss Niamala when Rogar's arrogant laughter made them spring stiffly apart; they had forgotten that they were prisoners.

"I see you know each other," Rogar said. "I'll leave you two alone for an hour to talk things over. After that I won't kill you, Tark. I'll kill the girl . . . unless you join us." He slid out of the room, and the clank of chains showed them that they were locked in.

"What are you doing here?" Tark asked.

She sat down disconsolately on the stone floor. "I came to rescue you," she said. "The revolution needs you. But I came rushing into the house without a plan, just rushing in like a fool, and so here I am." She gestured around wearily "Here."

He sat down beside her and she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Tark," she said, "I'm an awful fool."

"Everybody's an awful fool," said Tark, who had learned something in the last few days. "Don't let it worry you."

She smiled up at him in the darkness. "I mean you didn't need me to help you escape if you wanted to. You could have broken out of here at any time."

"What?" said Tark, bewildered.

"I keep forgetting you're the Liberator."

"Damn!" Tark jumped to his feet. "I thought you . . .I thought you could see the truth. I thought you . . . Listen . . . I'm only a shoemaker. Can't you understand that? I make shoes. I'm not a hero. I'm not a killer. I'm not a Liberator or anything else. I thought you . . ." He broke off, letting the echoes of his voice ring flatly from the stone walls. He wanted to say I thought you loved me and understood me, but he didn't dare. The memory of Phindus came back to him. She had kissed Phindus. She loved Phindus. Tark had never been as lonely as he was now. "I'm sorry," he said. Couldn't he ever get rid of the webs of misunderstanding? "It's just that nobody knows who I really am. Everybody thinks I'm somebody great. I'm not! I'm me! Tark! That's all!"

He was sitting on the floor again, and she was stroking his forehead with a cool hand. "Tark, do you remember Ramfis?"

"Who?" He didn't want to talk any more. When Rogar came back he'd agree to anything the man wanted. That was the simplest way out.

"Ramfis. The old historian in the cave."

"Oh, him. Sure."

"Tark, he fought beside your great-grandfather. He's an old man, Tark, and an honest man. He says you have your great-grandfather's spirit in you. Listen to me, Tark. Don't shake your head. Hear me out until I'm finished. If Ramfis says you're the Liberator, then it's true. You can count on that. It's true. Maybe you don't know it. Maybe you don't want to know it. But, Tark, you have the spirit of the Liberator in you, and you can free this planet from the Mauaii and from the dynasty if you want to. The Mauaii are in trouble, Tark. Have you ever noticed which of them are on Lan? Think, Tark! Only soldiers and officials and great lords and ladies and a few technicians. You can't build a civilization on people like that! Where are the common people among the Mauaii? Not here, Tark, but on their own planet of Ter." She twisted her lips to form the unfamiliar syllable. "Long ago their physical sciences advanced far be-

yond their knowledge of how to use them. Vast riches were theirs, but instead of using them they fought over them. Tark, they defeated famine and disease, but they couldn't defeat their own foolishness. And so war followed war, and the rights of the individual began to get lost in the shuffle. A country where everyone thinks the same thoughts and does the same things is stronger—on the brute level of force—than a country where people are free, and so in the name of preserving freedom, freedom was attacked. You've seen the results.

The Mauaii! Fighters who fight for oppression, rulers who rule for tyranny, a few rich people who live for nothing, and thinkers who are reduced to the level of technicians lest they think of something that may cause the rulers trouble. You saw the electric lights in the cave, Tark. They were set up for us by one of the Mauaii technicians who deserted them, and he was only the first. Without their technicians they're helpless. Think, Tark! Does it make sense that people who have spaceships must do their fighting with bows and arrows and swords?

It's because the warrior class distrusts the technicians, and because the rulers fear them. Well, Tark, the technicians have abandoned the warriors and the rulers. If the Mauaii fight us now it'll be on our own ground and with the same kind of weapons we have. They've kept us in ignorance for as long as they could, but they didn't realize that they lived in the same ignorance as we."

"Um," said Tark unenthusiastically. He loved her and she loved Phindus. All the talk in the world wouldn't fix that.

"And, Tark, listen. Even on their own planet they're in trouble. They never fully beat down the people who want freedom. Not here and not on Ter. Parts of their world had a long tradition of liberty, and they were never able to stamp it out. There's rebellion on Ter now, Tark; rebellion against the Mauaii. Listen to this. It's from an ancient document that some of the Terrans, as they call themselves, have been protecting for thousands of years. Listen, Tark. They never forgot it." She paused while a guard's heavy feet tramped past the door.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

"I still don't see what it has to do with me," Tark said.

"You don't? Freedom is everybody's business. Listen, Tark, we need you. We need every fighter we can get."

"Fighter?" said Tark. "I . . ." He broke off. Everybody thought he was a fighter. A fighter! If he were a fighter he wouldn't sit idly by and lose Niamala to Phindus. No. He'd fight to take her away from Phindus. He'd grab her and tell her he loved her. That's what he'd do if he were a fighter.

So he grabbed her and told her he loved her.

"Niamala, I love you."

"Sure, me too."

"What?"

"I love you too."

He let go and stepped back in amazement. "But . . . But I . . . But you went running up to Phindus when you saw him there on the mountain. You were always with him. I saw you. You kissed him. He kissed you. I . . . Don't you love him?"

"Of course I love him."

"I . . ."

"He's my brother."

"Do you think he'll come over to our side, Rogar?"

"He'll have to, Princess. I saw how he looked at that girl when we shoved her in with him. She'll make a perfect hostage."

"I won't feel safe until he's

dead."

"Neither will I, Princess, but we have to use him first. As soon as the people see he's on our side we'll be sure to win. After that . . ." He drew his finger across his throat. "We can kill the girl immediately, of course, and let him think we're holding her captive"

"Is that wise, Rogar?"

"Wise or not, I'm going to do it. There's power in complete ruthlessness, Princess: your enemies always underestimate you."

"How much longer are you going to give them?"

"Another half hour should be plenty."

"Half an hour! Five minutes would be better."

"But how are we going to escape?" she asked.

"Escape?"

"Get out of here."

"Oh." Reluctantly Tark brought himself back to reality. "You mean escape. I don't suppose we can."

"Well," she said, "it was nice knowing you. I suppose you know Rogar plans to kill me in a little while."

"No he won't. Not if I agree . . ."

"Tark! You wouldn't make a deal with Rogar. He wouldn't keep his side of it in any event."

"Well . . . I guess not. But to escape . . . that's hard." He looked around at the stone walls and floor.

"The Liberator could do it."

"I'm not . . ." There was no point in losing his temper. If he couldn't persuade even Niamala that he wasn't the Liberator, how could he ever persuade anybody else? "Wait! Aren't we upstairs here?"

"Yes," she said. "We're over the room where Rogar keeps the dynasty's documents. Old Ramfis says he'd give everything he has to be able to have free run of that room for a week. He says he could write a history that would . . ."

"If we're over another room then the stones in the floor here can't be very thick. They'd weigh too much." He dropped to his knees, glad to be able to cut off her talk about the old historian. Her faith in Ramfis' declaration that he really contained the spirit of the Liberator seemed to build a wall between them.

"Give me one of your shoes," he said.

"My shoe?" She held it out to him. "But why?"

"Watch." With practiced hands he ripped off the sole. "I recognized the make. There's a chunk of metal under the arch here to support the instep." He pulled the rest of the shoe apart. "Here," he said.

"Do the same to the other one."

Taking the piece of steel in his right hand, he began to work it into the cement joining one of the stones of the floor to the base of the wall. "How much time do you suppose we have?"

Niamala was kneeling beside him, digging with the other piece of metal. "I don't know, but let's hurry."

Ten minutes later she helped Tark pull the stone out of position. Together they kneeled and looked down into the dark room beneath them.

"Here," Tark said. "Give me your hands and I'll swing you down as far as I can."

She landed with a thump and a gasp. "All right," she called up.

Tark looked at his hands. Blood. "Why didn't you tell me you were cutting yourself? I could have dug that . . ."

"Come on down," she called. "We have to get out of here. You can heal cut hands but not a cut throat."

Tark grabbed the edge of the flooring and slid downward into the darkness. He hung full length for a moment, nerving himself to make the drop.

"Hurry up," whispered Niamala, and he let go.

Thump!

"Ow!"

"Shhh. They'll hear us."

"I think I've broken my neck."

"Did you?"

"No. I guess not."

"You made enough noise."

"I'm just not used to this hero business. I'm a shoemaker."

"Tark! Somebody's coming down the hall outside. What if he comes in here?"

"Shhh. Get behind me."

The door opened.

Bop!

"Tark! What did you do?"

"I hit him with one of these metal boxes. Help me pull him inside and shut the door again. Is he dead?"

"Unconscious. What's all this paper?"

"The box open when I hit him. The paper was in it."

"Tark! Tark!"

"What?"

"One of these papers is addressed to you!"

They sat down below the grating through which a dim light trickled, neither of them knowing that the Liberator's unmarked grave was only a few feet away in the same room.

"Rogar, they've had enough time together."

"Another fifteen minutes, Princess. I want to wear down Tark's nerve by the waiting."

"Are you arguing with me, Ro-

gar?"

"Princess! I am your humble advisor."

"Then have the girl taken out and killed."

"Yes, Princess."

"At once."

"In fifteen minutes, Princess. I have just sent one of my guards down to prepare her grave in the archive room."

"Rogar, you will have her killed now. Immediately. And then you will give orders that half of your guards are to be taken into my own corps of warriors. You have no need of so many personal troops. I said nothing of it before, but now, with this Tark business, you seem much too independant. Remember, Rogar, you are not ruler here. I am."

"My family has always served yours, Princess. You need not mistrust me. I shall obey your order. Guard!" He waited until one of his men appeared at the door. "You will prepare a squad to take and execute the girl . . . in fifteen minutes."

"This is amazing," Tark said. "I don't know what to think." He had the paper close to his eyes. Niamala tried to read it over his shoulder. Neither of them saw the guard twitch and start to roll over.

"What does it say?" she asked.

"What's amazing?"

"Listen to this: *From Tark the Liberator to his Descendants.* Listen. He wrote it himself. It says: 'I write this in haste, hoping it will someday reach my son or one of my grandsons. I am about to die. I am frightened. Perhaps writing this will enable me to pull myself together and face death bravely, but I am not a brave man. I . . .'"

"Not brave?" Niamala asked. "The Liberator not brave? But no greater hero ever walked on Lan."

"Listen to this," said Tark . . . 'but I am not a brave man. I fear pain and I fear death. I am told that the dynasty is erecting a great statue in the public square, a statue which will bear my name; my jailors have taken me to the room and let me see it. Deadly irony! It is of a giant, strong, confident. But I am only a small, weak, frightened man; and the rulers of Lan want the symbol of liberation to be a superman. It was not supermen who freed this planet from the Mauaii. It was men. It was ordinary men. And that is what these tyrants want the people to forget—that ordinary men have the strength to overthrow tyranny. It was fear that sharpened my wits in my battles with . . .'

Leaping to his feet, the soldier rushed toward the door. Tark

flung the document to Niamala, jumped at the guard, smashed him in the throat with one fist, bounced his head against the wall with the other, and slammed his knee against the man's jaw as he went down.

"I thought you weren't a fighter," Niamala said.

"Do you realize what this means?" Tark asked. "All my life I've been living under the shadow of that statue. All my life I've known I couldn't live up to my ancestor's deeds. But I can! I can do whatever he did! He was only a man like me. They made him into a symbol, but behind the symbol was a man. He fought one group of tyrants and another group killed him. But he was a man."

He took the paper back from Niamala. "Listen to this: the last paragraph. 'They will come for me soon: I understand I am to be buried here in the archive room!'"

"Here!" whispered Niamala.

'They will keep my death secret. The king's aide tells me he has already set a rumor afoot that I have been taken up to the land of the gods, that I will return every seventy five years to the body of one of my descentants if I am needed. Ashes in my mouth! Truth is what the people need, not superstition. All I have fought for is gone—one tyranny is as bad as another. But the people have overthrown the Mauaii, and I know they will overthrow the dynasty in time. I leave this paper among the thousands of papers here in the archives: it will be safe here. Tyrants, having no need of truth, have no need for history. When finally these papers are studied, I ask the finder to deliver this, my last testament, to any of my descendants then living. I am a man. I was a man. Stand in no hero's shadow: the sunlight is for everyone.'

Niamala was gripping Tark's arm tightly. "I didn't know," she said. "None of us knew. We never thought of him as human."

Tark drew a deep breath. "We're all human," he said. "All of us. Remember that soldier I fought in the arena? He was a professional hero, a killer, but he was as afraid as I was when he thought he was about to die. Niamala, I think we're going to win this revolution. Now let's concentrate on getting out of here."

"Rogar, I told you to have the girl killed immediately. Why did you give orders to wait?"

"Because I thought it best. The longer . . ."

"You thought it best! You!"

"Permit me to continue. The longer Tark and the girl are locked

in the room there, the more willing Tark will be to join us in order to save her life."

"You put your will above mine?" Who am I, Rogar?"

"You are the princess of the great house of Lan."

"And who are you?"

"I am Rogar, your devoted advisor."

"Stand up in my presence, Rogar. Without my support you are nothing, you are less than a beggar."

"Do you really believe that nonsense? Do you really think your silly dynasty could last two days without . . ."

"Rogar! Shut up and stand up or I'll . . ."

"Ah! The fishwife, the nagging shrew appears. Listen, you silly little . . ."

"You're under arrest, Rogar." Furious, she strode to the door. "Guards!" she called. "Arrest this man." Her whole body trembled with rage as she pointed at Rogar.

"They won't do it," he said. "It's time you learned . . ."

"Won't we?" asked one of the guards, drawing his sword. "You heard her highness, Rogar, You're under arrest."

"No he isn't," yelled the other guard. "You can't arrest Rogar."

Men died.

As the guards from the doorways were pulled into the fight raging in front of the princess' apartments, Tark and Niamala, hand in hand, walked peacfully out of the building. He knew now that the Liberator's spirit was in him, as it was in every man who feared death but hated tyranny.

"What will we do now?" Niamala asked.

"Now? First we'll get breakfast. Then we'll kick the Mauaii off Lan." He looked back. "I don't think the dynasty will give us any trouble, they seem too busy fighting themselves. Then we'll settle down and open a cobbler's shop."

And so Tark, Tark the Liberator, walked the streets of Lan after an absence of seventy five years.

THE END

Renwick, with too much time on his hands, was bored . He turned to Mead, in his discontent, only to discover some frightening aspects of his friend's hobby of collecting children's games and rhymes.

BEFORE THE FACT

Zenna Henderson

RENWICK looked out over the beautiful, orderly city. He watched, without seeing, the planes sliding down the power beams to the airport. If he had been in the mood for noting, he would have noted the sharp, clear mountains beyond the city, the green tracery of summer threading every street and alley with cool, rustling shade that darkened the soft pastels of the low gracious buildings. But, in the depths of one of his more and more frequent restless moods, he rapped his knuckles sharply against the window sill and turned his back on the out-of-doors.

"Anything specific?" Mead glanced up from his book.

"No, everything in general." Renwick perched briefly on the couch, but was back at the window almost immediately, staring blindly at nothing. With a mutter, he turned around again.

"Don't just sit there reading! *Do* something!"

Mead laid his book aside and gave Renwick his whole attention, folding his hands like an attentive child.

"Meaning, tell *you* something to do," he smiled. "Travel?"

"I just got back. The planets are no more interesting than earth. It's too far to go to be bored. Might as well stay here."

"Sports?"

"I'm tired of them."

"Work?"

"I've finished my days for this quarter."

"It's too bad you never felt drawn to the arts—say painting or sculpturing or ceramics. Or even writing. They say artisans can always find something to occupy themselves."

"Well, as far as that goes, I suppose I could occupy myself too, but I don't see any point to it. It isn't—isn't necessary."

"There's always marriage and a family."

"Yes, there's that, but why bother? Why perpetuate the race? What use *is* life?"

"There you have asked an immortal question," said Mead, tapping his finger tips together. "I imagine our remotest ancestors had the same query. Maybe life's like beauty—its own excuse for being."

Renwick came back to the couch and sank down, wearily.

"Everything is too finished. There are no more frontiers any more."

"Another immortal remark," smiled Mead. "You might at least amend it to no *apparent* frontiers."

"Well, look at us," said Renwick. "No more war, no more poverty, no more crime except killings, occasionally, and suicide — which, incidentally, are on the increase. No more worries about tomorrow. Health and certainty and security till it comes out our ears. Practically no government except in a coordinating capacity."

The corners of Mead's mouth lifted a little. "Of course you know you're describing paradise as it looked to our ancestors."

"Then I'd rather live in a time with less paradise and more interest." said Renwick petulantly.

"Quite a number of our people are finding their frontiers and interest in research into man's relationship to God and the Universe and inquiry into the nature of death and what follows."

Renwick squirmed uncomfortably, his face reddening.

"Um, yes—but it isn't—exactly in my line. I mean, it's all right, but I— I don't care for that particular type—"

Mead half smiled as he nodded thoughtfully. "Yes," he said. "Yes. If there has to be a reason, that could be why, perhaps."

"Why what?" Renwick was on the defensive. "Just because I don't go in for—"

"Just because you, like so many of us, are still embarrassed by the mention of God."

"I'm not embarrassed," protested Renwich, "I'm just—"

"Embarrassed," Mead smiled.

"Well, let it pass.

"I've recently come across something of considerable interest in connection with my hobby."

"Your hobby? Oh—oh yes, something about children's literature isn't it?"

"Not exactly. It's more child's play." Mead's lips lifted to his slight joke. "I have a wonderful collection of play chants, for instance, jumping rope rhythms and counting out rhymes and clapping rhythms. I recently ran down an intriguing rhythm-rhyme that begins—

In nineteen forty-four
My father went to war

"Imagine children s i n g i n g and rhyming as far back as 1944. It's hard to imagine warm, laughing children mixed in with those chaotic times, isn't it?"

"Very interesting." Renwick's tone belied his words.

Mead smiled. "No, that isn't the particular interesting matter I mentioned.

"As you know, one phase of my hobby has been the relationship of children's games and toys to their society—how society is reflected in their games. It was in the course of my research into the twentieth century that I noticed something odd. I think it has implications that should interest even you, along with a lot more of our restless citizens, many of whom, as you indicated, are choosing their own exits.

"I take a lot of interesting of late." Renwick relaxed on the couch. "But your voice is soothing." He smiled in genuine liking at Mead.

"Well," continued Mead, tapping his finger tips together again. "Early in the twentieth century as nearly as we can ascertain, this country had a horse-drawn economy. Horses loomed large in the picture, not only for riding and racing but as beasts of burden and as motive power in transportation. Naturally children's toys included horses and items pertaining to them, and suitable wheeled vehicles—echoing their culture.

"Then came the gasoline engine era and corresponding toy conveyances and games. These two eras did very little overlapping except in the 'cowboy' area of interest—but that's beside the point.

"Air travel came almost simultaneously with the gasoline era as historic time goes. And toy aircraft, dolls relating to air personnel and other game activities followed, based on air transport.

"So far—everything as expected. "But —" and Mead leaned forward — "Coincident with this expected development, came the first Anticipation."

"Anticipation?" Renwick roused enough to echo.

"Yes. That is what I call the type of phenomenon I observed for the first time in the era. For the first time, I found where children's toys and games *pre-dated* a development!"

Mead sat back in his chair, glowing with satisfaction.

"I'm sorry," Renwick shifted uncomfortably. "I don't get it."

"Let me explain further. After the air age began, space travel became a dream possible of achievement. As we know, space travel *did* develop in the twentieth century, but—now mark this—" Mead leaned forward and his finger tapped emphasis on Renwick's knee. "Children were playing with space guns and space ships and space helmets and space suited dolls for at least fifteen years before there was actual space travel!"

Mead sat back and waited. Renwick smiled ruefully. "So?"

"Don't you see?" Mead was impatient. "Horses—toy horses. Gasoline cars—toy cars. Aircraft—toy aircraft. Space*toys*—space *travel!* The children anticipated space travel in their toys, their games, their thinking *before* there was space travel. The whole basic order was reversed."

"But—" protested Renwick. "There must have been adult talk and planning and writing about space travel even fifteen years before it happened and even before the toys were made. And adults made the toys!"

"Of course, of course, granted," Mead fanned his fingers impatiently. "Adults are always in evidence, but try to make a child play with a toy it doesn't want. Try to force an interest that isn't there. *Something* anticipated long enough in advance for us to be able to see the gap from this far away in history, and it anticipated in such a way that it found expression among the children.

"Now, that isn't all. I started tracing major developments in history, correlating them with my chronology of toys and games. It was interesting— and a little frightening.

"Remember when they finally got to Venus? The first historic words spoken by man on that planet were—if you'll pardon the language— 'Hell-a-mighty! Look at the Smooleys!' Because the first moving live thing they saw was a herd of Smooleys.

"Not important? But did you know that at that time the children of earth had been playing with toy Smooleys for ten years? Almost identical. Those on Venus were four times as big, of course, and lacking the lavender stripe down

the back; but when photographs were brought back to earth, the real Smooleys looked wrong because they lacked the stripe. And that was the second instance of anticipation I found."

"It was the same before the establishment of the under-sea mining towns. For years before the towns were planned on a do-it-someday basis, children played in diving helmets. They clumped along in weighted shoes. They shouted their games nasally because of nose clips. Some, I imagine, even managed to sleep in their sea suits. When the towns became actualities, children were permitted incredibly soon. And I'll wager they felt very little oddness about the restrictions laid upon them. They were used to them already from their play, except now they couldn't carelessly strip off a helmet when mother called them to meals.

"Even in your own lifetime there has been a good example. Remember?"

Renwick smiled. "Sorry, Mead. I seldom associate with children. Never did like them too much."

"You wouldn't have associated with these anyway," said Mead. "They were children of the Mars Colonists."

"Oh, the Caveners?"

"Yes, you remember—or probably don't— that about ten years ago the children all started to deck themselves out with narrow strips of lunium. The craze grew until they looked like animated Christmas trees. Every article of clothing was fringed with lunium, head bands and bracelets and anklets and belts. And this was before the Break-Through four years ago. Remember that?"

"Why yes," Renwick straightened slowly. "They broke through into that cave where those unspeakable, horrible Guglins lived and had a time wiping them out before they got wiped out themselves."

"Yes," nodded Mead, "Though as a matter of fact, they didn't wipe them out, they walled them back in where they came from. And?"

"And their only defense," said Renwick in a tone of surprise, "Was to cover themselves with lunium fringe. Something about the glitter or the movement or the metal itself fended the Guglins off till they could figure out counter measures."

"Yes, exactly. But the children's play anticipated the need far enough ahead that some of the youngsters couldn't remember when children didn't dress in lunium fringe."

"Well!" Renwick's face was

amused through its surprise. "Maybe you've hit on something after all!"

"Yes." Mead smiled at the unconscious betrayal of Renwick's words. "I think so. Of course there were other instances more remote from our times. Some, but not too many. I curtailed my 'report' because my grandchildren should be home any minute."

Renwick scrambled to his feet. "Oh, then I'll be going. Don't want to intrude."

"Not at all." Mead motioned him back to his seat. "I would like to have you meet them. They're not so bad as grandchildren go. They've spent the day in Africa at that new lake in the interior. I can't remember its name. It's quite popular at this time of year for its water lilies."

A sudden shout of laughter echoed down the hall and there was the swift clatter of running feet and the door was flung open.

To Renwick it felt like an invasion. Five minutes later he had held somewhat tentatively three fairly grubby hands—two female and one male, had been weighed by three pairs of piercingly blue eyes, cataloged competently and set aside briskly and impersonally, before the three decended again upon Mead from all points of the compass. The riot was finally stopped by the intervention of a feminine echo of Mead who detached the children and, after introductions, collected them with a "Don't kill your Grandad completely."

"We're not killing him, Mother," protested the older girl. "We're only giving him our water lilies."

"Well, thanks for remembering me," laughed Mead, "But I think they'd be happier in the pond or even in your bath tub, than around my neck or behind my ears."

"Okay, Grandad."

The children gathered up the multicolored blossoms and started away. The older girl turned at the door, her brief skirts gathered up in both hands to make a lap for carrying the flowers.

"Oh, are you through with my dolls yet, Grandad?"

"Not quite, Chica. Maybe this evening."

"Well, okay." Her face was disappointed and her voice floated back to them as she left. "It seems to me Grandad's pretty old to be playing with dolls."

Mead and Renwick laughed together, but Mead sobered quickly.

"I want to show the dolls to you," he said.

"To me?" Renwick's eyebrows lifted.

"Yes." Mead went to his desk and got a small box from the bottom drawer. "This is the item I

thought might be of interest to you, Oh Citizen of a Finished World!"

His slight smile mocked Ranwick gently. He sat down again, the box on his knees. "It leaves me a little breathless," he said, pausing with the lid half lifted. "To think that I have detected an Anticipation before it became widely apparent. Even in view of the probable brevity of my pride—"

He laid the lid aside.

"Chica made the first of these dolls two years ago for herself when she was eight." He stood it up on the desk, where it wavered and then slid flat.

"She received the second for her birthday last year. Her mother finally found it in an out-of-the-way toy shop." He placed the second doll on the desk and it stood staunchly, returning Renwick's startled stare.

"This one she received for her birthday last week. It's number 16 in a series of 24, available at any toy shop." The third doll completed the row.

"Why I know what those are supposed to be!" cried Renwick. "I went through a museum last week in a moment of desperation. Those are ancient people who lived in caves. And wore fur garments, if any. And used clubs to—" His voice ran down and stopped. He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. His eyes went to Mead and clung.

"You mean you think that these—"

"I can only judge by the past," said Mead. "But I'm sure this is a genuine Anticipation. Stubby—that's my grandson—has been practicing, along with his contemporaries, with a sling-shot and a throwing club until he is uncannily accurate. I suggested bows and arrows to him and he only looked at me with that flat-lidded patience children assume in the face of adult stupidity, and informed me that bows 'didn't belong' in the game."

"But—but we're so secure! How could a whole world—?"

"Your despised s e c u r i t y," smiled Mead. "As to a whole world—even you learned in your youth what happened to the world during the Dark Days the reason why earth is not over-run with excess population today. I imagine before those days the teeming billions couldn't conceive of 'how.'

"Something more. The girls have an interesting jumping rope rhythm-rhyme:

Which do I get
The cave or the grave?
Lift foot, light foot
Run to be saved.
The cows and the sows

And the sheep and the rams
All taste the blood
Of the wooly, white lambs.
Fumble-y stumble-y
Alas, my friend
I run, I run
It is the end.

"Try analysing that little gem in one of your lack-luster hours. I asked Chica what it meant. She told me it didn't mean anything.. Then she added 'yet' and couldn't explain."

"Oh nonsense, nonsense!" cried Renwick. "You're just like all the other hobbyists, reading world shattering significances into your particular craze. It makes a pretty story but don't try to pass it off as the truth!" He stalked angrily to the window and back.

Mead lifted his book from the arm of the chair and settled back. Placidly he thumbled through for his place and paused, one finger between the pages.

"You're frightened," he said. "I don't blame you. So am I. Most particularly since I asked the children yesterday what they wanted to be when they grew up. They exchanged patient, forebearing looks with one another. Stubby answered for them.

"He said, 'Alive' ."

THE END

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Editorial ★

(*Continued from Page* 8)

you into unfamiliarity and shock. It must not tamper with your happiness; turn your mind into a morass of unorthodoxy (such as psychiatry that isn't psychiatry, but madness; psychological twists that NEVER happen in actuality, and if they do, are entirely unbelievable) insult your lack of education (if it can be called education).

A pox on the "ivory tower", the "sophisticate", the "egotist". All we want is science fiction for real, honest-to-gosh human beings, not freaks! And by heaven, that's what we've been plagued with in the past three years. A bunch of freaks whose delusion is (and was, we hope) that they were "different and superior", and therefore *belonged* in science fiction.

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And so
It was that
Once upon a time
There lived an old and
Evil Professor who was very,
Very fiendish. This was not good.
But when he joined forces
With Instructor McAwful,
The whole world
Trembled in
Fear.

FISSION STORY

T. P. Caravan

ONCE upon a time (alas, part part of this story is true) there was an old and evil professor who professed many sciences and who was giving a lecture to his terrified students. Now, this lecture was the last lecture of the term, and it was the professor's most famous lecture of all. It was so famous that students from every university within thousands of miles used to flee in terror to the nearest hills, for when he lectured this lecture dams used to break and earthquakes used to quake and thunderstorms used to come and knock down pine trees. And every year after the lecture was over the surviving students would all be failed.

Some years, of course, there would be no survivors.

It seemed that this was going to be one of those years, for the professor was at his best, which was identical with his worst. He had howled and foamed at the mouth, he had covered the blackboards with equations that had made them burst into flame, he had turned the janitor into a bat, he had proved that beauty was a myth and truth an illusion, and he was

just getting warmed up when the interruption came.

It didn't come from the students, for they were all under their seats, quaking with fright; even the student named John, who was the best student in the school, for they all knew that this was the last lecture they would ever attend.

No: the interruption came from a stocky man who needed a shave and a bath. He came into the lecture room while the professor was in midleap, and he came strolling down the center aisle just as if the air were not filled with smoke and thunder, crying out: "Congratulations. McAwful has decided to accept you in his project."

And when the professor heard this he was so surprised he floated gently down to the lecture platform and stopped talking. "Ek?" was all he could say.

"McAwful is instructor in political science in this old and famous university," the intruder said. "McAwful finds you show proper school spirit." He held out a muddy hand. "McAwful is me."

And all the students peeped over the backs of their chairs and shuddered, for they knew that McAwful was about to be murdered in some new and ingenious way; but to their surprise the old and evil professor was smiling mildly at him, so mildly that his fangs hardly showed, so mildly that a soft wind came and blew the smoke from the lecture room. "Political what?" asked the professor.

"Political science," answered McAwful, and even the frightened students chuckled. "Shake my muddy hands," he said.

"And what is political science?" asked the professor, and the students could see evil, like a small black ball, gathering itself at his back.

"Political science," answered McAwful, "as I practice it, is the body of knowledge which enables one to become ruler of this old and famous university. In particular it is the study of how to accuse one's enemies in the faculty of lacking in school spirit. Shake my filthy hand."

And the old and evil professor drew himself up to be ten feet tall and he reached into the air while lighting flashed at his fingertips and around the lunatic fringe of his hair and he screeched once and bang! he brought the lightning down on McAwful's head.

And then the old and evil professor knew that he had met someone as evil as he, for McAwful merely smiled an unshaven smile. "Fire doesn't bother old tail-gunner Joe," said McAwful. "Old tail-gunner Joe is a hero, and he has sent in for medals to prove it."

"Please sir, who is old tail-gun-

ner Joe?" asked one of the students.

"Bless you child, old tail-gunner Joe is me," answered McAwful. and he went to the window which overlooked the sea and pointed his finger at an airliner which was passing by. "Bing!" he said. The airplane turned upside down and rolled over three times and went splash! into the waves. "See?" said McAwful. "Probably full of spies."

"Golly," said the student, looking at McAwful with worship in his eyes. "I don't like your methods, but I must admit you get results. All those spies! Please sir, I was an aerial gunner once and I wonder if you can tell me what the rad lead is for a fighter in pursuit curve at an angle off of twenty two and a half degrees if your plane is doing two hundred and fifty. I forgot."

And McAwful looked at him and the student fell dead.

"Another spy," said McAwful. "You can always tell a spy."

How?" asked the student named John.

"Anyone who disagrees with me is a spy, utterly lacking in school spirit, and he deserves all he gets," answered McAwful, beginning to look at John as he had looked at the other student.

But now the old and evil professor had recovered from the shock he had received. "Stop," he cried. "How dare you kill my students? Back to the politics department with you! The school of physical science is mine!" And the students all shouted agreement, for they preferred to be murdered by someone they knew.

And McAwful looked at the old and evil professor and handed him a cheese. "Here," he said. "A gift."

"Poison?" asked the professor, somewhat mollified.

"Naturally. Everything I touch turns to poison." He grinned. "But I have bigger gifts for you, much bigger."

And the professor turned to the students. "Class dismissed," he said. "Leave at once. All but John." He bowed courteously to McAwful. "I hope you don't mind if I test a bit of this valuable cheese: the scientific method, you know." And the students, all but John, rushed frantically from the lecture hall and took to the hills. "Here, John," said the professor, handing him the cheese.

"Thank you," said John, "but my wife doesn't let me eat between meals." He handed it back. "Sir," he asked the unshaven intruder, "are you the Instructor McAwful who's in charge of project Whimper?"

"I am." said McAwful, smiling, smiling, always smiling. "And that

is what I came here for." He looked at the old and evil professor. "Cooperate with me," he said, "and I'll make you head of the scientific division. And this is a great honor, for McAwful has searched through the entire faculty of this old and famous university to find a man who can be trusted with the task."

"But," said the old and evil professor, "What is Project Whimper?"

"Ah," said McAwful. "It is the old and famous unversity's private atomic bomb project. I have discovered that every man on the job was a spy, lacking the proper school spirit, and I have also discovered that every other member of the department of political science was also a spy: consequently I have taken over the great task of leading the project. If you agree to cooperate with me, I am sure that McAwful can find all the other professors of science are unreliable. Yes: McAwful can prove that none of them are true supporters of the football team."

Now, when John heard this, he sat down bewildered on the floor, for he knew that the old and evil professor was the only spy in the entire old and famous university and that he had been selling the university's secret plays to a rival university for many years, and that, of all professors, the old and evil one was the one who least supported the football team: In fact one of his hobbies was murdering quarterbacks and putting drugs in the linemen's food to make them lose weight.

"I accept," said the old and evil professor, smiling a secret smile to himself; for he knew that, although McAwful was as evil as he, he was less wily and could be tricked. "What do you wish me to do.?"

And they put their evil heads together and plotted. When they had finished plotting, McAwful shook hands with the professor (but not with John) and scurried from the room to accuse his enemies of lacking school spirit. You could watch from the window that overlooked the campus and see how he left a small trail of smoke behind him as he ripped books from the students' hands and set them afire. Faintly his voice floated into the lecture hall: "Books! What do you need with books when I'm here to tell you what to think?"

But he did not know he had plotted right into the old and evil professor's old and evil hands. "Come, John," said the professor. "We have work to do, pleasant work." And John shuddered, for he knew that the only work the professor considered pleasant was trying to end the world. "I have been

trying for a long time to get on Project Whimper." And he laughed, "Yeek, yeek." And his laughter mingled with the crackle of burning books. "McAwful is accusing the people who have been trying to stop me. Come, John, in the name of science!"

But even the name of science would not make John join the professor in his old and evil schemes. "No," he said. "Ninety-eight point six times No."

But the professor was a genius (so, by the way, was John and so was John's wife (and so was nearly everybody else at the old and famous university except the football players (and, of course, McAwful (who was merely evil)))) and consequently he knew how to overcome John's school spirit. "Come, John," he said, "and be my lab assistant on the project and I will not flunk you. You will graduate!" And of course John had to accept, for he had been twelve years at the old and famous university trying to get his degree: he had to accept even though he knew that the end of the world was coming as soon as the project was over. That's the way students are. All but football players: they never graduate if they can help it.

But they never help end the world, either.

Anyhow, John acted as the old and evil professor's lab assistant for three days while the old and evil professor studied the atomic bomb the school had developed. "Yeek," cried the old and evil professor at the end of this period, "take this down, John." And he dictated a long and obscure formula, full of minuses and pluses and sigmas and thetas and x's and iambic pentameters and roots and coefficients and similar scientific rubbish. "Do you know what this is, John? This is the formula for a self-perpetuating chain reaction. When the bomb is set off it will set off the surrounding air which will set off the rest of the atmosphere and the rest of the earth and the earth will set up fission in the entire solar system and boom! there goes your galaxy!" And he leaped up and down, trampling on his beard in his joy. "I have destroyed the universe!"

Oh, he was happy.

"Take the formula home, John. and don't lose it." And John took it home and didn't lose it, for he knew that a scientist was not responsible for the results of his scientific work: there are some who disagree with this idea, and in some universities they are shot, while in others, like the old and famous university where this story takes place, they are merely considered eccentric and perhaps lacking in

school spirit. He didn't lose it, but he showed it to his wife, who looked at the formula and kissed him in delight.

This puzzled him but he liked it.

Time passed. Graduation day came. John graduated. People cheered. The old and evil professor laughed. McAwful got his picture in the paper, kissing a baby. The baby, no doubt a spy, died. John handed his diploma to his wife. "Put it in a safe place," he said. "We're going to destroy the universe this afternoon." She kissed him again. And off everybody rushed to watch the bomb tested.

John and the professor and the bomb sat in a small room in a large tower while John fed the formula into a computer which typed a tape which operated a servomechanism which twirled a tool which made a small machine which the professor placed near the bomb.

And McAwful ran around below taking credit for everything including the football team's record for the last ninety-eight point six years.

"Now," said the professor. "It's ready. Yeek! Self-perpetuating. One explosion setting off another. Forever! As long as there's anything left to explode!" And he danced happily on the casing of the bomb. "It goes off in three minutes. Better get to a safe place." And he doubled over with his evil laughter, for there would be no place anyplace which would not explode along with the bomb. "Come," he said, and they rushed from the tower, the professor taking great leaps like a vile kangaroo, his great ears flapping in the breeze.

"Two minutes," he cried as they reached the watching crowd. McAwful slung great heaps of mud in all directions to celebrate. John shuddered. John's wife laughed. "One minute." screeched the professor. "Oooh." said John. "Time's up," said the professor.

"Sizz," went the bomb. "Click," and it sat there, not exploding. And the universe continued on its way, not being destroyed. "Spies," shouted McAwful, and for once he was right, though he didn't know it.

And then John's wife went over to the president of the old and famous university who was trying to scrape some of McAwful's mud out of his hair, and she whispered into his dignified ear and he went over to the old and evil and frustrated professor and shook his bewildered hand. "It works," he said.

"Works!" cried the old scholar in anguish.

And the president took the formula and spread it out on the

ground. "Joy!" he cried. "A perfect defense against atomic bombs. Joy!"

"But . . ." said John as his wife drew him aside.

"Listen," she said. "It was a formula to make the fission products set off fission in the surrounding enviroment, and make those new fission products set off more fission, and so on, wasn't it? The way a fire in the open air sets fire to anything around it and that new fire spreads out in the same way? Wasn't it?"

"Sure," said John. "But why didn't it work?"

"Listen," she said. "What's the opposite of that? A formula to make the fission products damp out any fission starting around them, the way a fire in a closed room uses up the oxygen and puts itself out along with any other fires in the room." She smiled. "I simply turned the formula into its opposite."

"But how?" asked John, who now and then forgot his wife was a genius.

"Easy," she said. "I changed all the minuses to plus and all the pluses to minus." And they ran in happy circles around each other while the old and evil professor writhed on the ground and chewed huge rocks into gravel and McAwful, as soon as he found out what had been invented, took all the credit.

THE END

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THE SANTA CLAUS PLANET

By Frank M. Robinson

What could be more appropriate than to spend Christmas on The Santa Claus Planet? But here, the crew of the Churchill found, the Giving of Gifts had sinister meanings not usually associated with the Christmas Spirit.

"I THINK the town is over this way, sir," Hawsworthy said, his words coming out in little puffs of steam.

Leftenant Harkins waited until there was a brief calm in the flurries of snow whirling about him, then shielded his eyes and stared in the direction that Hawsworthy had pointed. There was a small cluster of lights in the distance—a good two or three snowy miles away, he judged sourly—that couldn't be anything but the twinkling lights of some primitive village.

He sighed and pulled the collar of his heavy tunic tighter around his neck, then turned for a last look at the *Churchill,* the sleek and shiny line cruiser bulking huge in the valley a few hundred yards to the rear. Her ports were radiating a cozy, yellow warmth and he could catch glimpses of her officers and enlisted men standing around the brightly bedecked tree in the main lounge. He even fancied that he could hear the strains of *Cantique Noel* and smell the hot spicy odor of the wassail drifting up on the cold, sharp air.

Christmas Eve . . .

He bit his thin lips in disappointment. Outside in the cold on a fool's errand while inside the *Churchill* the Christmas celebration was just getting started. He had

done the best he could in making arrangements with Ensign Jarvis to save him some of the wassail, but knowing Jarvis' own enthusiasm for the monthly liquor ration, they were shaky arrangements at best.

A sudden gust of snow hid the ship, and he and Hawsworthy wheeled and started trudging towards the faint glow on the horizon.

It was traditional in the service, Harkins thought, to set the ship down on some hospitable planet for Christmas. Christmas wasn't Christmas without the solid feeling of the good earth under you and the smell of pine and the soft mistiness of snow drifting gently down from the sky.

Naturally, there had been a lot of enthusiasm aboard ship. The commissary had been busy all week filling the ship with the appetizing odors of synthetic roast goose and plum pudding and the pleasant spiciness of fruit cakes. And the carpentry shop had spent many a hard afternoon building the tree out of fine dowels and daubing it with green paint, just in case they were unable to obtain the genuine article.

Then—only an hour ago, Harkins thought bitterly—the captain had asked to see him and his own personal enthusiasm had collapsed like a pricked balloon.

The captain had discovered that the planet supported a human culture, so it was naturally incumbent on the *Churchill* to send forth a deputation to invite members of the Terran speaking community—if any—aboard to celebrate Christmas with the crew, present the ship's credentials to the powers that might be, and try and arrange for possible planet leave.

And as he had once dabbled in anthropology, the deputation was to be made in the person of Leftenant Junior Grade Harkins. Which meant that he would miss most of the celebration. On top of that, he had drawn Hawsworthy for an assistant. (There was nothing wrong with Hawsworthy, of course, except that he had an amazing talent for making you feel ill at ease and unsure of yourself. He was a twenty-year man and you always suspected that his feelings towards the junior grades were composed more of toleration than respect.)

"It can't be much further, sir. I think I can make out some of the buildings." The lights of the town were considerably nearer now and the rough shapes of small houses had begun to separate themselves from the snow-filled blackness.

A fool's errand, Harkins thought for the twentieth time. The records

showed that the people were nothing but primitives, but that hadn't prevented the captain from doing "the decent thing" and sending out a representative anyways. Tradition. The people were probably fish-eaters, however, and any authority to which he might present the ship's credentials undoubtedly resided in the painted and scarred body of the village witch doctor, probably hiding under his cooking pot right now.

Then they were on the summit of the last hill before the town, gazing down at the village below; a village where the streets were neatly laid out, the houses were a large cut above the usual thatched or skin affair, and primitive arc-lamps were strung across the snowy streets.

Harkins felt uneasy. It wasn't at all as primitive as it should be.

They walked into the seemingly deserted town and had proceeded a few blocks when Hawsworthy suddenly stopped and pulled out his pistol. "Something's coming, Lieutenant."

Harkins' heart rose into his mouth. There was a measured tread of feet down a side street, and a moment later a procession marched into view. Four natives dressed in rich furs were in the van and behind them came an opulently decorated sleigh, pulled by a large, splay-footed animal. The procession halted and the four natives in front bowed low before Harkins and Hawsworthy.

For the first time, Harkins noticed that they were carrying what were obviously meant to be gifts. Huge, circular sheets of beaten copper with crude designs hammered in them, and hampers containing what looked like not-too recently slaughtered carcasses of alley-cats. The native straightened up and proferred the gifts, then backed away, obviously expectant.

Harkins accepted the gifts, awkwardly, after which there was a long and increasingly heavy silence. Finally a voice from within the sleigh spoke.

"Don't just stand there—destroy the gifts, then hand them your pistols."

Harkins gasped. The voice spoke his own tongue excellently.

Hawsworthy chewed his lower lip and looked bellingerently. "If we do, sir, we'll be unarmed and at their mercy. I wouldn't advise it."

"Please show yourself," Harkins said to the curtained sleigh.

The curtains parted and a man stepped out. He was plump and betrayed the usual signs of easy living but his eyes were alive and his face showed a familiar ruddiness. The Terran type, Harkins thought amazed; he showed it distinctly.

"Do as I tell you and nothing will happen to you," the man urged.

"We would like to see your ruler," Harkins said stiffly, thinking of an alternative.

The fat man put his hands on his hips and cocked his head at them. "You're looking at him. The name's Harry Reynolds and I run this planet—at least, this small section of it."

Harkins digested this in silence, then awoke to his responsibilities as a representative of the *Churchill* and introduced himself and Hawsworthy.

"You're sure no harm will come of this?"

"My word," Reynolds said expansively.

Harkins pondered for a moment, then flamed the copper shields and the hampers and handed over his pistol. Hawsworthy did the same. The natives smiled, stripped the cartridges from the pistols, broke the plastic barrels, and finally bowed low and withdrew.

It was then that it occurred to Harkins that things were looking up. The natives were friendly, a Terrestrial was running things, and chances for planet leave looked highly probable.

Then another thought hit him. He turned to Reynolds and saluted. "Sir, the officers and men of the *Churchill* would be highly complimented if you consented to celebrate Christmas with them on board ship.

Reynolds accepted with alacrity and Harkins gestured to the sleigh "I'd suggest using your sleigh, sir; We'd save time."

Later, seated on the warm cushions of the sleigh and skimming over the countryside, Harkins reflected proudly that his commandeering of the sleigh was a master stroke. Hawsworthy was duly impressed with his quick thinking, and it looked highly possible that they'd get back to the ship before Jarvis had had a chance to consume all the wassail.

It was going to be a pleasant evening at that, he thought, and not the least of its pleasantness was going to be when he pinned Reynolds down and found out just how he happened to be running things.

He looked at Reynolds' ruddy face out of the corner of his eye. There was probably quite a story to it.

Back in the *Churchill*, the junior grades soon had Reynolds surrounded.

"What do you call this planet, Mr. Reynolds?" Jarvis asked, glass in hand. (Something different than the numbers and letters the maps give it, I imagine."

Reynolds ran a finger down the side of his nose and looked thoughtful. "The first few weeks I was there, I thought that I would call it the "Santa Claus Planet."

Jarvis looked puzzled. "The Santa Claus Planet?"

"Yes. You see, the natives had made quite a ceremony out of giv-gifts — but that's all part of the story."

Harkins seized the opening. "Tell us about it. Back in the town, you said you ran this section of the planet. I couldn't help but wonder just how you did it."

Reynolds filled his glass again. "You can chalk it up to imagination and quite a dose of plain, dumb luck. It started about thirty years ago, when I was returning to Canopus from a business trip. My tubes blew and I had to make a forced landing on the planet. Naturally, I was stranded until I could make repairs . . ."

* * *

Reynolds groaned and slowly opened his eyes. The cabin seemed to be spinning tightly around him and he fought for control of his stomach, then gave up the struggle and turned on his side and let everything come up. After that, the feeling of nausea gradually passed and the cabin settled down, but it settled at a thirty-degree slant. He vaguely recalled the crash and rolled his eyes slightly to take in all of the cabin. What loose equipment and furnishings there were had been swept down the inclined deck to come to a rest in a broken, jumbled mass against the far bulkhead; he couldn't tell what other damage there might be but thin curls of blue smoke were drifting up from the engine room— the slightly acrid smoke of burning insulation.

But the ship was still whole, he thought grimly, and he was still alive, which was a wonder considering that he had been juggled around the inside of the rocket like a pair of dice in a shaker. He moved one arm experimentally and then the other. They were stiff and sore, and blood had dried on a few nasty looking cuts, but no bones were broken.

The feeling of nausea hit him again and he retched, then gathered his courage and staggered to his rubbery legs. The port on the side of the cabin nearest the ground was shattered and fresh, cool air was blowing through the opening. It smelled good and helped clear more of the cobwebs from his head. Inspection of the hatch a moment later showed that it was hopelessly stuck so he found a broken handrail and laboriously battered out the fragments of quartz still in the port, then painfully crawled

through and dropped to the grassy ground below.

He lay where he had fallen for a while, collecting his strength, then stumbled over to a stream not far from the ship. Half his shirt served as a wash-rag to help scrub off the grease and grime and clean his wounds; out of the other half he made crude bandages. He was gasping from weariness when he finished and slumped down on the bank to take stock of his situation.

The task of repairing the ship wasn't an impossible one—maybe two weeks, maybe less. In the meantime, he was stranded on the planet.

He found a phosphorous tipped cigarette in his pants and drew in on it, watching the tip turn to a cherry red coal.

Stranded.

But he couldn't have been stranded in a better place, he reasoned. He had crashed in a low, broad valley with the stream running through the center of it. A carpet of grass dotted with the pink of some alien flower covered most of the ground, while surrounding the valley were low hills and forests of huge, fern-like trees. The weather seemed warm and temperate and the sky was a rich, tropical blue, with fleecy shreds of clouds drifting slowly by.

He brushed a lock of thinning black hair away from the bandage wrapped around his head and frowned. According to his star map, the natives were human— probably the degenerate remnants of those who had colonized the planet hundreds of years ago—but friendly.

At least they better be, he thought; there weren't any weapons on board ship to speak of.

The warm sun made him drowzy and he let his thoughts wander where they would. Two weeks here and then off to Canopus where a somewhat shrewish wife and his small sickly daughter would undoubtedly demand a long and detailed explanation of what had kept him. They would probably refuse to believe the truthful story about blown tubes so he would have to devote a part of his next two weeks to fabricating a wildly implausible and slightly incriminating story that they *would* believe.

But until then he had two weeks of hard work and solitude ahead of him. In a way, a very pleasant vacation.

He plucked a blade of green grass from the side of the bank and chewed on it for a while The work could commence tomorrow; he'd have to rest and recuperate today.

He turned on his side and dozed the rest of the day.

The sun had barely risen the next morning when Reynolds was up and and inspecting the damage done to the ship. The bottom jets were fused and crumpled, the generators would have to be rewound, and stanchions and handrails and brackets on the inside would have to be welded back in place.

He got a shovel from inside the ship and walked around to the tube assembly, the dew on the grass dampening his canvas work shoes. It might be wise, he thought, to dig a hole under the rear jets, leaving the rockets balanced on a ridge of earth, so he could get at them. That would be the biggest job and the most difficult, and next to the generators, the most important.

He shifted awkwardly in his overalls, then pushed the shovel into the ground, heaved, and threw the dirt over his shoulders. The dirt was rich, fertile looking loam which looked like it had never been farmed. The people were probably strictly a hunting society . . .

The sun was hot and he found he had to take frequent rests from the digging. He had never been the muscular type in the first place and with his arms as sore as they were, it was tough going. But by noon, he had worked himself into a pit about waist-level and by late afternoon, he was shoulder-deep. He had long since taken off his heavy, twill work shirt and the sweat had soaked into his undershirt and burned into some of the cuts that hadn't healed yet.

There were two feet to go before the tubes would be completely unearthed, but he had to rest. He ached in a million places and blisters had formed, broken, and festered on his swollen hands. He put the shovel to one side and sank quietly down on the cool dirt.

Five minutes later there was the quiet pad of feet above him and a soft voice said: "We bring presents for the man from the rocket."

He looked up, startled, his hand clutching the shovel for a possible weapon.

Then were three of them at the top of the pit. Two of them were hawk-eyed, bronzed men, dressed in richly decorated animal hides. They were inspecting him curiously, but not with the curiosity of natives who had never seen strangers before. Reynolds guessed, and rightly, that there had been visitors to the planet in the past.

The third member of the party—the one who had spoken to him and apparently the only one who understood his language—was a rather pretty girl with the soft, rounded features that so many native girls seemed to have. He looked at her with more than casual interest, noting that her skirt was of ma-

chine made cloth, probably the bottom half of a *mother hubbard* that wandering missionaries among the stars like to clothe their heathen charges in. She had discarded the upper half of the garment, apparently preferring the sunshine and freedom.

Reynolds climbed to the top of the pit and made a half bow, then showed that his hands were empty. (What the devil did you do in a case like this?) The men were carrying what he supposed were gifts: thin shields of beaten copper with crude native designs hammered on them, a few blankets made up of thick furs, and baskets full of freshly slaughtered meat that didn't look at all appetizing.

The men set the gifts on the ground in front of them, then stepped back with malicious smiles on their faces. They chattered for a moment to the girl in their native language.

"These are the challenge gifts of my people, the Mantanai," she intoned ritualistically, her face solemn. "We shall return tomorrow to accept what you give in return."

Reynolds had a feeling that he wasn't supposed to benefit by the gifts.

"What do you mean 'challenge gifts?' " he asked.

She looked like she was going to explain, then changed her mind and gave a short shake to her head.

Reynolds felt the tension build up in him. Her attitude confirmed his opinion that he was going to be in for a difficult time.

The girl turned to leave with the men.

"Wait aminute," Reynolds asked softly. "Is there a Father around?"

She shook her head again and Reynolds thought there was a trace of pity in her eyes.

"No," she said. "The good Father has returned to the skies."

He had a hunch that she didn't mean the Father had left the planet in the usual manner.

"What happened to him?"

She hestitated a moment and he could feel the slow ooze of sweat on his forehead. Behind her, the other two natives were frowning and shaking their heads with impatience.

"He—didn't win the game of the Giving of Gifts."

Reynolds cooked his supper over a campfire beside the ship but he had lost most of his appetite and didn't eat much. The gifts from the natives were Greek gifts, he thought. There was something ominous about them, something far different than the friendliness that usually prompted gift giving.

He worried about it for a while, then turned into his crude bed of

blankets and air mattress. There was a lot of work to be done the next day, natives or no, and he needed his sleep.

He had just started to doze off when he heard the stealthy footsteps of something moving just beyond the dim circle of light cast by the glowing coals of the fire. The sounds came nearer and he pointed his electric torch in the direction of the quiet rustling and flicked the switch.

The girl stood there, blinded by the glare of the light.

"What do you want?" he asked harshly.

She wet her lips nervously. "The good Father was kind to me," she said, almost in a whisper. "You reminded me of him."

Primitive tribes usually had little regard for their women, he thought, outside of the children they might bear or the work they could do in the fields or in making clothing for the men. The Father's kindnesses had apparently made quite an impression on her.

"What's that got to do with coming here?"

"I thought that I would tell you about the Giving of Gifts," she said. "I thought that you would like to know."

That was damn sweet of her, he thought cynically—then softened a bit. She was probably running quite a risk in coming to him.

"Tell me about it," he said gently.

She sat down beside him, the light from the coals catching the highlights of her body.

"Father William used to say that my people, the Mantanai, were the original capitalists," she started, pronouncing the word uncertainly. "That to us, coppers and furs and grain weren't the means to an end, but an end in itself. That we liked to accumulate wealth merely to play games with it and because it brought—prestige."

She was parroting Father William's words, he realized; they meant little to her but she was confident that they meant a lot to him.

"What kind of games?"

She thought for a minute, trying to find a way to phrase it. "We use our coppers and furs in duels," she said slowly. "Perhaps one chief will give a feast for another and present him with many coppers and blankets. Unless the other chief destroys the gifts and gives a feast in return, at which he presents the first chief with even greater gifts, he loses honor."

He was beginning to see, Reynolds thought. The custom of conspicuous waste, to show how wealthy the possessor was. Enemies dueled with property, instead of with pistols, and the duel would

obviously go back and forth until one or the other of its participants was bankrupt—or unwilling to risk more goods. A rather appropriate custom for a planet as lush as this.

"What if one of the chiefs goes broke," he said, explaining the term.

"If the winning chief demands it, the other can be put to death. He is forced to drink the Last Cup, a poison which turns his bones to jelly. The days go by and he gets weaker and softer until finally he is nothing but a—ball." She described this with a good deal of hand waving and facial animation, which Reynolds found singularly attractive in spite of the gruesomeness of the topic.

"What if a stranger like myself is concerned?"

She looked at him sadly. "Then the pride of the tribe is at stake—and the penalty for losing is always death."

He digested this in silence, "Is that the only way they use their wealth."

She shook her head. "No. They use it for buying a wife or a house or in paying for a grandson."

She started looking anxiously over her shoulder and he could sense her fear of discovery growing, overcoming her memories of the kindness of Father Williams. He quickly steered the conversation into other channels and found out, among other things, that Father Williams had given her the Christion name of Ruth. He idly wondered what it would have been if Father Williams had been a Buddhist or a Mohammedan. At length she arose to go.

"You'll come back again some other night, won't you?" Reynolds asked wistfully, suddenly realizing how lonely it was to be in a dangerous situation and have nobody you could talk to.

She hestitated, then flashed him a quick smile and fled into the darkness.

After she had left, Reynolds mused about his position with a sinking heart. They'd be back tomorrow and he'd have to present them with gifts that they considered superior to what they had given him. But he had nothing extra, nothing that he could actually spare.

The only solution—and it was only a stop-gap solution, he realized somberly— was to gradually strip the ship and hope that he had her fixed and ready for flight before the deadly game had reached its climax.

The native representatives and Ruth were back the next day, along with a large crowd of curious onlookers. Reynolds waited inside the ship until they had begun to

grow restless, then stepped out carrying his presents.

But there was a ritual to be followed first. He had built a bonfire earlier that morning and he now lighted it. Then he dragged forth the furs and the hampers of meat and the coppers they had been given the previous day. He faced the crowd and held up the meat contemptuously, then flung it on the fire. The representatives flushed, but there was an approving murmur from the crowd. The furs he looked at scornfully, then tore the stitches where they had been sewn together and tossed them into the flames. The sheet of beaten coppers, which he had previously weakened with acid, he broke into small pieces over his knee and cast them after the furs. The crowd roared approval but Reynolds had no illusion as to their temper. They liked a good "game" but they had no doubt as to what its conclusion would be.

He gestured to Ruth to come over and translate for him to the two red-faced representatives. His voice was loud enough so the crowd could catch the scorn in it, though they didn't understand the words.

"Tell them that the Mantanaii bring children's gifts, that they are not fit to accept; that their tribe must indeed be poor if this is all they can afford. Tell them the gifts I shall give them will make theirs look like the castoffs of beggars."

Then he started enumerating his own gifts in turn. One air mattress, two wool blankets, a chair of stainless tublar steel. He hesitated. There wasn't a sound from the crowd, so he continued adding to the pile. A white twill space uniform, a chest of exquisite silver he had meant as a gift for his wife, and a set of pale, translucent pottery he had picked up on Altair. The crowd was murmuring now, impressed. Finally, with a show of disdain, he threw on a sleek, black jacket of heavy, shiny leather.

Once again the crowd roared approval, then started to drift away. Ruth nodded slightly; for the moment he had won. But only for the moment.

He worked furiously all afternoon and long into the night, his welding torch a bright spot of white in the blackness. How much time he had left, he didn't know. But it wouldn't be much.

The next morning he was awaken by the clamor of the crowd outside the rocket. The natives and a haggard Ruth were waiting for him, along with a file of men carrying heavy bundles.

The challenge gifts for the day had arrived.

It was a week since he had

crashed on the planet, Reynolds thought jitterily, and despite working practically every waking hour, the job of repairing the ship was still only half done.

And the deadly game had progressed apace.

Everything not absolutely essential to the operating of the ship had gone. Stanchions, railings, ladders—every bit of shiny, glittering metal that he had thought might appeal to the native eye as being of value. And then all the dishes, the linens, his voco-writer, and most of his clothing had followed. All delivered to the property crazy natives who had looked them over curiously, then destroyed them to show how worthless the items were in comparison with their on wealth.

And in return, what had he done? How many coppers and furs and blankets had he been forced to destroy? And it meant nothing to the natives because the planet was so lush that there was much, much more where that had come from.

It was the contents of his ship against the resources of a planet and there wasn't the slightest doubt as to how it would turn out.

"I've stripped the ship," he said quietly.

Ruth moved closer to the fire. the yellow light playing on her smooth, tan skin.

"I know," she said. "You've lost the game."

He couldn't have done much better, though, he thought grimly. He had played out what he had as well as he could, analyzing the native sense of values so he had some idea of what they attached worth to.

"When will they come for me?" he asked dryly.

She was staring into the fire, the leaping flames reflected in her green eyes.

"Tomorrow, maybe the next day. And then next week you will be nothing but . . ." She left the sentence unfinished and gave an expressive shudder instead.

Reynolds felt a little sick with fear. There was no way out. If he ran away, he would be running away from his ship and all chance of ever getting home. His chances of surviving alone on the planet would be slim anyways.

"My father will be here tomorrow to watch," Ruth said.

"Your father?"

She showed her teeth. "My father. The tribal chief, the wealthiest man in the village.

They were all turning out, he thought, to watch Reynolds entertain at the big celebration.

Then he caught the look on her face and tried to forget his troubles. She wasn't having an easy

time of it, risking her life to give him information and do what little she could for him.

"How did Father Williams ever get into this mess?" he asked.

"When he first came here," she said, "there was a big sickness. Father Williams helped the Mantanai and my father let him clothe me and teach me your language. But after a few years they forget and made Father Williams play the game of the Giving of Gifts," She paused, and then repeated: "He was very kind to me."

If he ever got out of it alive, Reynolds thought, he'd build a monument someplace to the memory of Father Williams.

The clearing around the ship was jammed the next morning, natives of all shapes and sizes jockeying for position to see Reynolds' final humbling and open admittance of the wealth of their tribe. As interested as brokers on the floor of the stock exchange watching the quotations on the board, Reynolds thought dryly. He wondered how some of the natives would do if they were suddenly transferred to his own society. With their lust for wealth and shrewdness at manipulating it, they would probably own the universe within a year.

As usual, he had a bonfire already to light. Then he made a great show at stacking the mounds of coppers and furs and tanned skins and the hampers of food; probably enough to feed and clothe the village for a month, he reflected.

"The people of the Mantanai are mighty,", he intoned solemnly, Ruth translating, "and their feats at trapping the *arapai* are sung in hunting songs passed from father to son." He picked up several of the thick, luxurious furs lying on one of the piles. "But these cannot be the pelts of the *arapai;* rather, they are the thin and smelly hides of the wood rat," And he threw the pelts scornfully into the flames, followed them up with the others in the stack. The crowd "ohed" and Reynolds knew the chief's face was burning.

He picked up one of the huge sheets of copper next.

"I have heard tales of the mighty value of the *Copper-of-Many-Suns,* and have heard its praises from many throats. But why then, did you not bring it to me? Why this ugly imitation that would not fool a child of six, this piece of hammered *hunswah?"* He broke it into pieces along the lines etched by acid. and consigned it to the flames. The *Copper-of-the-Autumn-Feast* and the *Copper of- the Laughing-Waters* followed.

It was forty minutes later when

he had finally thrown the last of the hampers of food into the oily flames, to the gasps of the stunned crowd.

Then the chief was striding towards him, magnificient in his richly decorated furs. Ruth trailed after him, her face calm but her eyes showing fright.

"You have destroyed the mighty coppers and the soft skins of the *arapai*," the chief said silkily, "but they were wealth of no great importance. You, perhaps, have gifts that would put these to shame, gifts that will show your might and your own great wealth."

He was faintly sarcastic, knowing full well that Reynolds had stripped his ship.

"I have," Reynolds said calmly, catching the startled look in Ruth's eyes. He pointed to a pile of goods just outside the port of the rocket that he had spent most of the night assembling. "Succulent and tasty foods, breads and meats that will last your tribe for many days, and a machine that will take the basest of materials and turn them into the choicest of delicacies."

The piles included all the provisions he had had on board, including his synthetic food machine.

As before, the crowd good naturedly shouted their approval and left, knowing that the climax had merely been postponed another day or so.

After they had gone, Reynolds could feel the fingers of fear grip his heart once more. There was no way back now, except the slim chance that Ruth might be able to help him restock on the sly with native foods.

The day was a cloudy one, an excellent day for working on the rocket. The clouds cut the enervating heat of the sun and Reynolds felt filled with a new enthusiasm. Even the odor of burning grease, fired by the heat of his welding torch, smelled good to him. He was a day away from finishing his repairs; another twenty four hours and he would be on his way to Canopus with an explanation for his delay that was so bizarre it was almost bound to be believed.

He had finished with one of the last strips on a firing tube and was just reaching for another clay-covered welding rod, when he spotted the procession coming down the valley. The chief and the two stern-faced representatives and Ruth. And, as always, the thrill seeking crowd.

Only twenty-four more hours, he thought agonizedly, and that was to be denied to him: One more turn of the planet's axis and he would have been gone . . .

"You are to go to my father's

house for the next feast," Ruth said heavily. "They are planning on it to be the last one."

He dropped his welding torch and made ready to follow Ruth to the village. There was no chance of changing for dinner, he thought grimly, with only one pair of pants left to him. All his other clothing had gone the way of "gifts."

The chief's house was an elaborate, thatched affair with a large circular opening in the roof. Beneath this opening was the open fireplace, black with the ashes of many fires. Currently there was another fire in it, roasting the huge haunches of meat for the feast and broiling the tubers buried in the coals around its periphery.

The feast was an elaborate one to which, apparently, the entire village had been invited. The enclosure was packed with hot, sweating natives whose eyes were glued on every mouthful of food that Reynolds took and every move he made.

The condemned ate a light meal. Reynolds thought, *and he didn't enjoy a single bit of it.*

The interminable meal and entertainment finally came to a halt and the chief raised his arms for silence. At his signal, a dozen of the young men in the hut disappeared and came back bearing the cartons of supplies and the food machine that had been Reynolds' "gift" a few days before.

"The stranger is mighty," the chief said solemnly, "and has shown that he possesses great wealth. But, alas, his weath is as nothing to that of the Mantanai." One of the men threw a carton on the flames and Reynolds watched it puff up in smoke. "It is as the dew in the morning, compared to the waters in the ocean." Another carton. "The number of people in this village compared to the blades of grass in the valley."

It was insane, Reynolds thought; a cultural mania that apparently would go to any lengths. A fanatical, perverted capitalism run wild.

The last of the cartons had been consumed in the fire and the food machine reduced to twisted metal when the chief turned to Reynolds.

"It is now our turn to show the might of the Mantanai, the great springs of wealth of our people."

Again the twelve young men disappeared and came back hauling the usual variety of gifts, but this time in an incredible profusion. An exclamation went up from the crowd that quickly dwindled to awed silence as the chief enumerated the gifts.

"The furs of one hundred *arapai*, caught in the prime period of spring, switched and tanned with

the gentlest of willow boughs . . . the *Copper-of-the-Many-Winters* . . . . the *Copper-of-the Endless-Snows* . . . . twenty two hampers of the plumpest and most perfect of fowls . . . . the *Copper-of-the-Wild-Crows* . . . three hampers of the reddest of wood berries, noted for their succulence and flavor . . ."

The mere enumerating took half an hour and by the time he was finished, the center of the hut was packed with the hampers and furs and the reddish wheels of copper.

The chief finished and turned triumphantly to Reynolds.

"What have you to offer now, stranger? It is your turn for the Giving of Gifts!"

Ruth finished translating by his side and sat down on the floor beside him.

"I have nothing to offer," Reynolds told her in a low voice.

We are finished then," she said softly.

Now that he had finally reached the climax, Reynolds felt too tired to feel fear. "Say a prayer for me and Father Williams," he said in a stricken voice.

She shrugged faintly. "We will say one together."

The way she said it made him glance at her, startled. "What do you mean?"

She laughed softly. "Because we shall be together. They know that I have been helping you. While you have been playing the game, I have been safe. But now that you have lost, whatever happens to you will happen to me."

The crowd was oninously still, waiting for the climatic moment when Reynolds and Ruth would be seized and forced to drink of the Last Cup. The chief was even ready to motion to his aides to seize them, when Reynolds got to his feet and strode to the center of the room.

He stared bitterly at the surprised crowd for a moment, then spat on the nearest copper and hurled it into the fire.

"The gifts of the Mantanai are as the gifts of small children," he said loudly. "The wealth of old women."

He kicked through the assembled gifts like a small cyclone, pulling at the furs and edging the hampers towards the fire, until at last the huge fire had spread to twice its original circumference and the flames had begun to crisp the thatch around the hole in the roof and blister the natives closest to the fire.

When he finally stopped, the crowd was watching him in expectant stillness, waiting for his offer.

"I offer in turn," he said slow-

ly," a gift of the house of many fires, the arrow of shining metal that voyages among the heavens; my rocket."

There was a roar of astonishment and heads bobbed in eager approval.

He had won again, Reynolds thought weakly, but the comedy was in its last act.

Ruth came to see him early the next morning and they found a secluded spot on the bank of the stream, not far from the now guarded rocket.

"You were very brave," she said.

He resisted an urge to be modest. "I know."

"My father was very much surprised."

"I rather suspected that he would be," Reynolds said indifferently.

She was quiet for a moment, starting intently into the waters of the stream.

"Will you miss not going back?"

"Of course," he said automatically, then began to give it some thought. Would he be sorry about not going back? If he stayed away, he would be taken for dead and insurance would amply provide for his family. And being provided for was all that they had wanted of him anyway.

Besides, the people here weren't bad people, despite their twisted outlook on matters of property.

"Well now, I don't know," he added thoughtfully. "Perhaps after a while I could learn to forget . . ."

She laughed and then asked: "Will you like being a chief?"

He hunched himself up on one elbow and stared at her questioningly. She wasn't smiling any more.

"You will be a chief soon," she said. "At least for several days.'

"How do you mean?"

She gestured at the village and the surrounding land. "They will destroy the rocket this afternoon; then all this will be yours as their last gift."

He felt expansive. "That means I've won, then, doesn't it?"

She shook her head. "You will own the village and land, but only for a while."

It was a very clever idea he thought, suddenly no longer appreciating the beautiful day or Ruth's company. They would give him title to the village and all the lands of the tribe, and there the game would end. Since he was unable to return an even more worthy gift, the remaining portion of the custom would be carried out, during the performance of which he would automatically become an absentee landlord, so to speak, and

the property would all revert back to the original owners.

The game was at an end. He wouldn't very well destroy their "gift" or give them something in return; he was a bankrupt.

He was admiring the landscape and the beautiful stream and the fine tropical weather with a sort of sickly enjoyment, considering it was probably the last time he would be able to do so, when the idea struck him. Why not? What had he to lose?

"How much time have we left, Ruth?"

She looked up at the sun. "Not long, perhaps a few of your hours."

"That's time enough." He grabbed her wrist and then ran downstream, to a small cul-de-sac along the bank, not far from the ship.

The drums of lubricating oil—an even half dozen—were still where he had cached them, to prevent any possible fires when he had been welding on the ship. He found a rock and pounded the spout of one until it broke and the oil was free to gush out, then turned the drum on its side and started rolling it rapidly along the bank, the oil spilling out on the grass and spreading over the calm waters of the stream.

By the time time the few hours were up, Reynolds had finished with the last of the drums of oil and was ready to receive the chief and the thrill-seekers from the village.

"The wealth of the Mantanai is great.".

(There was a pounding from within the rocket as natives cheerfully hammered the generators and the coils and the delicate thrust machinery with rocks and crude metal bars.)

"The wealth of the Mantanai is as the sands on the beach."

(There was a shaking and rattling sound from the rocket as the delicate meters and instruments were pounded to fragments of glass and metal).

"The wealth of the Mantanai is as boundless as the stars in the heaven."

(There was a hissing noise as the huge bonfire was lit in the control room).

Reynolds accepted the destruction of the rocket calmly; he had accepted it's ultimate fate for what seemed a long time now. But his turn was coming.

After a long and elaborate ceremony, Reynolds was gifted with the village and the lands surrounding it and presumably the people in it. Then he stepped forward with a lighted torch in his hands.

"The lands of the Mantanai are as the egg of the vulture: worthless.

A poor land, with a poor people. See, I think little of it!" and he cast the torch at a wet spot on the ground.

The wet spot flared into flame that became a rapidly twisting snake of fire, leading down to the stream. A moment later, the waters were thick with flames and oily black smoke.

It looked like Reynolds was indeed bent upon the destruction of the land. The chief was white. "The stranger really means this?"

Reynolds nodded grimly and the first of the drums that he had cached behind the village went up in a roar and a gush of flames. The assembled natives paled. Another drum went up.

"We shall be killed!" the chief cried, his eyes rolling white.

Reynolds smiled. "The property of the Mantanai and the Mantanai themselves are as nothing."

Another drum.

"But you, shall die!"

Reynolds shrugged. "My last gift. I knew you wouldn't want to ascend into the skies without taking me along."

The chief suddenly knelt and kissed Reynolds' calloused feet. "The wealth of the stranger is mighty; that of the Mantanai is small and insignificant." His face was terror stricken. "The stranger has won the game!"

The last of the drums went up.

"Perhaps," the chief pleaded, "the wealth of the stranger is so great that he can overlook our own small lands and village?"

They were learning humility at a late date, Reynolds thought. But he nodded solemnly and extended his hands toward the flaming oil barriers around the village. There were no more sudden gushes of flame and gradually the oil on the stream burned out.

He had won, Reynolds thought shakily, won on a *bluff* with practically no time to spare. Another ten minutes and the flames would have died by themselves, exposing his deception.

But he was still stranded, and stranded now for the rest of his life. There were compensations, of course, chief among which was the fact that he would be spared his unhappy homecoming on Canopus.

And this planet was comfortable, the weather was nice. And he had always been the comfort loving sort, anyways.

And then there was Ruth.

"About the girl Ruth," he started to the Chief.

The chief's face immediately grew stern. "She interfered with the game of the Giving of Gifts. She will have to take the Last Cup."

Reynolds was aghast.

"But look here, I own the village and all the lands surrounding it! I . . ."

The chief shook his head. "It is traditions." Then his face grew sly. "But, perhaps if the stranger was willing to consider a gift, the girl could be spared."

There wasn't any doubt as to what he was driving at.

"What do you want?"

Firmly. "The village and lands to revert to their owners."

Later, on the bank of the stream, Ruth leaned her head in the crook of his arm and gazed dreamily at the sky.

"You know why you won, do you not?"

Certainly. They were afraid they were going to lose all their property."

She shook her head. "Partly. But mostly because you were willing to lose your life, your last gift as you said. They could never have matched it."

He nodded vaguely, not too much interested, and told her his plans for the future and just where she fitted into them. He should have seen long ago, he thought, that her efforts to help him hinged on more than just the past kindnesses of Father Williams.

She didn't reply to his question. He flushed, thinking that possibly his conclusions had been all wrong.

"You forget," she said softly. "The bridal price."

He lay back on the bank, his head whirling. With the reversion of the village and lands back to the tribe to save Ruth's life, he was broke. He had no property of his own.

He had won his life—and hers—he thought, but he had finished as a bankrupt in the most brutally capitalistic society that nature had ever created, without even the bridal price for the women he loved:

Reynolds finished the story, and sipped the last of the wassail in his cup.

"Then when we gave those natives our guns," Harkins said, "it was doing essentially what you had done. Short circuiting the ceremony of the Giving of Gifts by offering our lives, the ultimate gift, the one that couldn't be topped."

"Essentially," Reynolds agreed, "though that's a simplification,"

"I don't understand," Jarvis cut in, puzzled. "Harkins here says that the town has been considerably modernized. How was that accomplished?"

Reynolds swished the last few drops of liquor in his glass and watched the small whirlpool thoughtfully.

"I'm a comfort loving man myself, and as I became more wealthy and consequently gained more power in the village council, I saw to it that my own ideas for civic improvement were carried out." He started looking around for the wassail bowl. "Really, quite simple."

There was a short silence, leaving an opening for the strains of "Silent night" emanating from a small group of overly-merry carolers in another corner.

Harkins looked Reynolds slowly up and down and thought to himself that the man was lying like a rug. There were gaps in his story big enough to run the *Churchill* through.

"I was wondering, Mr. Reynolds," he said. "You had to give back the village and lands to save the girl's life." (The way Harkins phrased it, he obviously didn't approve of Reynolds taking up with the native girl, but that was neither here nor there). "And that left you as poor as the proverbial churchmouse. Just how did you gain your wealth and influence?"

"I worked a full year," Reynolds said, "before I earned Ruth's bridal price. Even at that, her bridal price wasn't great, less than that of some of the other belles of the village. Their tastes in feminine beauty weren't the same as ours, you understand."

"I don't see what bearing that has on it," Harkins said stiffly.

Reynolds felt around in the folds of his cloak, then passed over a simple drawing to Harkins. It was a crude line drawing of a plump, pleasant faced woman surrounded by her family.

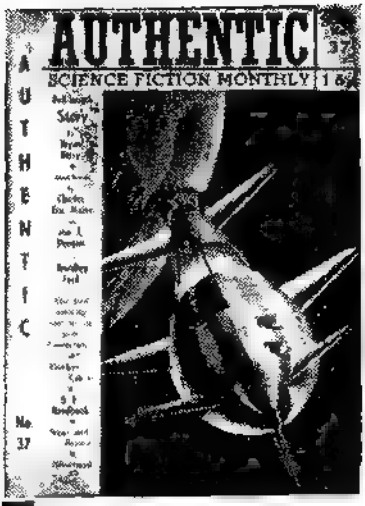
"I think I told you before, that the natives also used their wealth in paying for their grand-sons. That is, a father-in-law would pay a hundred percent interest on the bridal price his daughter's husband had given him on the birth of his first grandson. Two hundred percent for the second child and four hundred percent for the third, doubling each time. Now most of the Mantanai don't care much for many children, but Ruth and I had always thought that we would like a large family. And Ruth's father you remember, was the wealthiest man in the village."

Harkins was staring open-mouthed at the drawing, counting the number of children and frantically doubling as he went along.

"Of course, a good deal of luck was involved," Reynolds said expansively "Fifteen children—all boys!

THE END

★ ★ ★



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THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

IT was back in the days of ancient Egypt when the Royal Families were so exclusively Royal that brother and sister married, because everyone else was of inferior blood. This went on generation after generation until the Royal Family become extremely inbred. Love had nothing to do with it. But along about twenty-one hundred B. C. there was a young pharoah named Amontahachachapt, if I got the spelling right, and, according to the archeologist at the Smithsonian Institute who translated the story from the original slabs inside his pyramid, he actually was deeply in love with his sister. According to the pictures of her on her mummy case she was like most of the women of those days, a flat chest and all angles, with her head always turned profile-wise to show off her Egyptian nose and chin, and arms held up at odd angles with wrists looking like they were broken—you've seen those drawings yourself. But to Amontahachachapt the First, since he was in love with her, she undoubtedly looked all curves. She was very short. Only about four feet eleven inches tall. Amontahachachapt has only one claim to fame, so far as the historians can determine. He had a pet name for his sister that is still famous down to this very day. That pet name—and probably only Forry Ackerman will have guessed it ahead of time—was "short 'n' inbred."

On Thursday October 28th at 7:30 P. M. the Los Angeles Science-Fantasy Society will celebrate twenty years of continuous existence. The 20th Anniversary meeting will be held in their regular meeting place, Freehafer Hall, ground floor in the Prince Rupert Apts., 1305 Ingraham, Los Angeles, where they meet every Thursday evening. Ackerman, who is the second worst punster in the world, will be there, suffering from a feeling of the futility of existence because I discovered the most perfect pun in the English language before he did. So if you want to see in the flesh a man who is con-

templating the futility of further existence, without it costing you one penny, this is your chance.

In addition, LSFS, or "Lass-fass," as the club members call it, plans to have a gala gathering of 3-in-1 motif: Hallowe'en, Re-union, and Welcome. Everyone is cordially invited.

Chad Oliver, Ray Bradbury, A E. van Vogt, Henry Kuttner, Richard Matheson, E. Everett Evans Catherine Moore, E. Mayne Hull, and R. S. Richardson will be there and will no doubt autograph that book of their's you have if you take it along with you. There'll be a dozen or so other writers there, whose stories you've seen in magazines, and of course lots of science fiction fans.

In the same month of October, on the 6th, the University of Chicago Science Fiction Club will hold its first autumn meeting—and don't let the name fool you, because so far as I know none of the members go to the U. of C. They merely hold their meetings there, in Ida Noyes Hall, 1212 E 59th St., Chicago, Illinois, every other Wednesday evening at 7:30 P M .

They are planning a gala quiz show. (That "gala" business comes from quoting directly from the advance notices sent me by both clubs.) They're a nice group of fans, and since I'm living in Chicago at present I often attend the meetings, and will probably attend this one.

It would be nice if more clubs would send me details of a specific meeting whose date is far enough ahead so that it wouldn't be past history before *Universe* reaches the stands. I'm writing this August 20th, so you can figure from that the minimum time lag you will have to allow for.

By the time this appears, the big convention at Frisco will be past history. It will be the first World Convention I have missed in several years. Where will the 1955 convention be held? My prediction is Cleveland; but whatever city gets it, the Club House is open to them at any time for announcements, reports and requests. At Earl Kemp's, where I was invited for dinner a few evenings ago, I learned he had finally received his membership card for the convention, but still no convention report. At this late date the membership card Frisco undoubtedly sent me a week or so ago will probably have been lost in the mails, as I've changed address two or three times during the ten months since I paid my dollar. Earl's membership card was numbered five hundred and something, which indicates that there should be quite a turnout for the Friscon. The membership card was signed

by Les or Es Cole, so I know that the Friscon is in good hands, even though there has been no sign of life visible to me from the direction of San Francisco,—nor to anyone else in the Chicago area that I've talked with—until now, two weeks before convention time. This will all be past history by the time you read this, so—on to other things . .

With *Universe* bi-monthly instead of appearing every month, I have two or three issues of some of the fanzines on hand, sent in during the past sixty days. I also note that there are more fanzines from England and Canada than there used to be. I'm going to have to more or less group the fanzines to get them all in, but in they will get, even if Bea has to cut out all the editorial to crimp the CLUB HOUSE into the space allowed for it. So . . .

Indiana seems to lead with four fanzines, all different in title. They are FEMZINE, MERLIN, EISFA, and ISFA. We'll take them in that order.

FEMZINE: 10c to non-subscribers; "A fanzine for and by *THE FANETTES*", editor Juanita R Wellons, 529 Milton Ave., Anderson, Indiana. Co-editor is Lee Anne Tremper, and Honey Wood is President of the Fanettes, with Noreen Falasca sec-treasurer. The fem-fan club is getting reorganized after a year of being snowed under with inactive leadership. Their fanzine shows the result of the revival. It's good. An unusually good fantasy, "Little Black Cloud," by Lee Anne Tremper held me spellbound to the very end. Fashion of the Future, is a nice article with no author listed. It his drawings of dresses from 2025, 2052, 2058, and 2065. Why don't some of you fanettes make and wear clothes like that? MmmMM!! There's also a list of the members of the club.

MERLIN: no charge, but send her a dime to take care of the postage and envelope; first issue; Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Indiana. Very good artwork, and several pages of cartoons, some of which could have found sale with professional magazines. In her editorial Lee says she is now out of college and up to her neck in fan activities again. After reading some of the stories in this issue I think it's worth a quarter, but if Lee wants to work for nothing that's her business. Poetry, too . . .

The bat-winged shadows, carved
by moonlight, fly
With flapping pinions through
the tortured trees
Stirring the leaves to somber
litanies
That echo through the dark like
one vast sigh . . .

That's from "The Night of Eden" by Edd Roberts, on page 11. Forty pages, and they're really something!

EISFA: 5c; Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association; Juanita R. Wellons, 529 Milton Ave., Anderson, Indiana; August issue. Vol. II, No. 8. "Assignment in Space" by Robert Coulson is a space opera, but far better than the average one found in professional magazines. It was given loving handling by Eisfa's staff artists with six illustrations. It was worth it. Carlton Crosby's account of an EISFA meeting is hilarious and—well, perhaps as factual as some of the newspaper items I've read. There's twenty pages of thorough enjoyment that should make you an EISFA fan even if you don't live within a thousand miles of Indiana.

ISFA: 15c; Edward McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Indiana. Volume I, No. 2, June '54 issue. A little late for sending in to be reviewed, Edward; but by the time this hits the stands summer vacation will be over and you'll be back in business again. Any of you living in or near Indianapolis can find out about I.S.A.F. meetings by writing or phoning Robert Adair, 41 59 Broadway Ave., Hu 1659.

SPIRAL: 10c; Denis Moreen, 214 Ninth St., Wilmette, Ill.; July 1954 issue No. 8. The kind of a fanzine I delight in reading from cover to cover. A long letter column. Ten pages of letters, with replies by Denis, from old familiar names like Lynn Hickman, Gregg Calkins, and Ed Cox, and new names like Burt Beerman, Don Wegars, Paul Mittelbuscher, Dick Geis, etc . . . Several discussions being tossed around.

Claude R. Hall has an article, "The Doppel-Rad Effect", which sums up very accurately what is wrong with science fiction today. Not only has science outstripped its fiction, but fiction has run out of new ideas. What new monsters can space opera dream up? What new ideas in human mutations? Time travel plots are to stf what murder in a locked room is to detective fiction. Even future civilizations that have anything new to them are hard to find now. Editors have been forced by a dearth of new ideas to rely more and more on the story that carries itself without an idea worthy of a story. It is, perhaps, a necessary trend; but it carries science fiction closer and closer to the conventional story, and when it gets too close it will lose the basic appeal of science fiction, which is—not for sex, not for purely human problems, but for new ideas, new implications of old ideas, new exploration of apparently exhausted

veins of thought.

Some pro editors are stuck with the idea that the feature novel must be one where the world is doomed—but the hero saves it. World Crisis, Cosmic Crisis, must take the feature spot. But it isn't entirely their fault. Or, in some ways, maybe it is. I, for one, have been told too much what to write and what not to write for editors, Ray Palmer excepted. I think he's the only editor who hasn't told me what to write. "As little of the philosophizing as possible, Rog." "Your sex is too naive, too juvenile, Rog. Get some SEX into your story, boy!" As a consequence, the story that makes the reader stop reading for a moment to sit back and digest an idea or a new implication which opens new mental horizons for the readers, is now somewhat tabu with editors. A writer who gets such a theme hesitates about writing it, knowing it won't find a ready market. I think what it boils down to is that, (a) most editors are convinced that the majority of editors must be right in their current policy so it's less risky to ride the same train with them, and (b), most editors are convinced that the readers are mainly juveniles, and when the editor has to pause to figure something out, the juvenile reader will be completely bogged down—so it's a bad story to publish.

See what I mean about Spiral? It has what professional magazines don't have too much of, and haven't for some time. Food for thought and for speculation, and discussion. Where was I? Oh, yes—reviewing the fanzines . . .

DEVIANT: 20c; July 1954, issue No. 3; Carol McKinney, Sta. 1, Box 514, Provo Utah. Perfect mimeography on cheerful yellow paper that sets off the black ink nicely. Good artwork on almost every page. J.J.R. (a pseudonym) tries out his public with a serious article whose aim is to establish some sort of a "philosophy" for fandom. He promises more articles for future issues of Deviant.

"Ring Down the Curtain" by Harold Bunan has a nice opening. "There's only one thing wrong with these extra-terrestrial expepeditions," Roy Morris thought uncomfortably. "A guy gets into so damn much trouble." He glanced over to his right where Phyllis Hope was tied to a post driven into the sand . .. The story doesn't let you down, either. There's a letter column too, and of course Terry Carr's "Face Critturs", which are always very good. You have to see them . . .

DIMENSIONS: 20c; July '54; Harlan Ellison, 41 E. 17th Ave.. Columbus 1, Ohio. Sixty-four pages—which sets a record for

this pile of fanzines. A two color mimeographed cover, "Factor Forgotten", by Jack Harness, which was the winner of Dimensions' annual cover contest. There's an inside front cover, and a back cover illo too.

The contents? There's so much I couldn't begin to cover it adequately. A couple of stories fill twenty of the pages. The other forty-four pages have articles and features of every description, by too many names to mention. I'll bet Harlan can't put out the equal of this issue again in a long time!

NITE CRY: 10c; May and July issues; Don Chappell, 5921 E. 4th Pl., Tulsa, Okla. Official publication of the Oklahoma Science Fiction Confederation. Tulsa isn't far from Kingfisher where an aunt of mine lives. I spent my sophomore year at Kingfisher High. So it brings back old times to read, in the July issue, "Time for the editorial, and with the temperature about 110 deg. F. I am not much in the mood for banging this ole typer." But that one outburst evidently put him into the mood, because his editorial gave all the current Okla fan news with brief and interesting sidelights.

There is something really new in this zine, and I wonder someone hasn't thought of it before. "Sooner Flashback" by Dan McPhail, gives the news of fan and pro doings 18 years ago. A regular column of that type in a fanzine would be a wonderful thing. "Claude Rambles" by Claude R. Hall tells something about where he's stationed in Germany. He's in the army now, and misses fan doings. Jann Hickey, in "I'm curious" discusses the mystery of Venus. He tosses out several ideas about Venus that would form the basis of good stories, without seeming to realize it.

The July issue continues the Sooner Flashback under the title, "Smoke Signals" and is even more interesting than before. These items came from *Science Fiction News*, a fanzine published in Oklahoma during those years. I hope this feature of Nite Cry continues.

FOG: 5c; Don Wegers, 2444 Valley St., Berkeley 2, California. A dittoed job, and I wonder why more fan editors don't use the ditto method. Probably because the original cost of the machine is too much. But with ditto you can get more than one color with a single run, for one thing, A nice rambling fanzine with fan fiction and humor, most interesting article being "Nothing But The Truth" by Denis Moreen, which tells of the never ending efforts of a certain prozine to get him to renew his subscription when he doesn't want

to because the mailman wrecks the magazine putting it into the mailbox.

EC FAN JOURNAL: 10c; issue 5; Mike May, 9428 Hobart St., Dallas, Texas. "Craig of the Vault" by Larry Stark takes up 9 of the fifteen pages, and discusses Johnny Craig, 28 years old, senior artist on EC's staff. Well . . . If you're a fan of *VAULT* and *MAD*, and kindred comic books, you will probably find this zine a valuable addition to your "library". That's why I reviewed it, even though it isn't a science-fiction fanzine. I'll continue to review it when it's sent in, even though I personally wouldn't be caught dead with an issue of either comic book in my possession.

ECLIPSE: 10c; Raymond Thompson, 410 S. 4th St., Norfolk, Nebr. Issue No. 9. In "The Path of Totality." Ray describes himself and his combination sleeping room and workship in a careful manner that gave me the pleasant impression that I would enjoy dropping in on him if I ever passed through Norfolk, Nebraska. There's some limericks about Little Willie on page twelve that are pretty good. For instance:

Little Willie hung his sister.
She was dead before we missed her.
Willie's *always* up to tricks—
Ain't he cute? He's only six!

Besides Ray, there's Val Walker, Art Kunwiss, Dobby Stewart, and Paul Mittelbuscher in the pages of this zine—and a page of Terry Carr's "Face Critturs." This is a fanzine you'll get quiet enjoyment out of, just like you were at home with the guys.

KAYMAR TRADER: 10c; issue No. 85; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave., Moorehead, Minn. This is a straight adzine, for the person interested in finding stf and fantasy books and back issue magazines for trade or for sale. Twenty-two pages of ads. I know of no other outlet that is so complete. I would venture to say that if it's for sale it's available through Kaymar. And you readers who have fantasy books and magazines you would like to sell, an ad in Kaymar is only a dollar for a full page.

ZERO: first issue, August '54; 10c; James Chamlee, 208 N. 9th St., Gatesville, Texas. Mimeographed on green paper with oversize red paper cover and back with a fantasy front cover illo by Jim Stein. In his editorial James expresses thanks to Terry Carr for material from his FANZINE MATERIAL POOL for this first issue. Sometime, maybe, Terry Carr would like to write about the fanzine material pool for the readers of the CLUB HOUSE. Would you, Terry? Somewhat along that

line in ZERO is an article by Terry Carr, "A Suggestion For Fanzine Writers" which gives a lot of pointers for fan writers. It alone makes it worth sending for this issue of ZERO. Several very good short stories. And an article by Ray Robel, is "Is Shaver Using the Old Testament as a Reference Book?"

ZIP: No. 5; 5c; Ted E. White 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va. Mimeo, with yellow contents page and green cover illo, 26 pages. The departments are fiction, satire, and columns—a nice division. Under satire is "An Open Letter to a Congressman" by Hoy Ping Pong. Claude R. Hall comes up with a real idea in the story, "The Delivery". It's about the delivery boy who goes to the lonesome house off the road, delivering salt, pepper, bread, and butter. What else does he need to deliver, since he's to be the roast Long Island duckling?

This No. 5 issue is 8½ by 11. Issue No. 4, also on hand for review, is only 5½ by 4¼, quarter size. Frankly, I don't see why Ted changed size The smaller zine is the best pocketzine I've seen. It has a story, "Desert", by Mike Reynolds; Ted claims there is a glaring error in this story, and offers a prize to the first one to put his finger on the error. In issue five in the letter column no one has found it yet. It intrigued me, so I read the story through several times. I couldn't find the glaring error either. Of course, there's a *scientific* error, in that the atmosphere of Mars is too thin for man to breath, but it would be unfair for Ted to let that be the error, because it must be accepted that man can breathe on Mars or there isn't a story.

INTERPLANETARY: 5c; first issue, quarter-size; Randy Brown, 6619 Anita St., Dallas 14, Texas. This zine is an example of what I was talking about in a previous issue when I said that refusing to review, or panning an inexpert job of publishing is bad business. Randy shows that he's on the ball. Put a few subscribers on his list, have a few letters from friendly fans in his mailbox, and make him feel he's *worthy* — whatever that means—of being a fan publisher, and you'll see him break his neck right up there with the best.

In the fan fiction department is "Too Late", by John Fugler that has a nice twist at the end. And there's an article, "The History of IF", by Randy Brown. Also some cartoons, not expertly done, but okay. So okay, you readers, make him feel welcome.

Last in the pile of U. S. fanzines is "Answerzine" from the desk of PROJECT FAN CLUB. Orville W. Mosher, 1728 Mayfair,

Emporia, Kansas, which probably won't be available, but is a very practical idea. In it he answers the letters that have piled up, all in one fell swoop, and sends the bound copy of letter excerpts and his replies to all those he owes letters to. The way it turns out, it makes a better fan news zine than one designed for that purpose.

There are two fanzines from Canada. First is

CANADIAN FANDOM NO. 21: 20c; Gerald Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ontario, with Bill Grant and Ken Hall, also of Ontario. The eleventh year of publication, for this zine, although I believe there were some years it didn't see print. Beak Taylor had it from 1943-47, and Ned McKeown from 1947-51. It has stayed very much the same over the years in excellent workmanship and high quality contents.

"Fandom's Current Controversy" by Norman G. Browne has to do with Mickey Spillane, Amazing Stories, and Howard Browne, its editor. I wasn't aware there was a controversy going on, but the article is good reading, anyway. Stanley Couch tells "How To Identify" in a humorous article on flying objects such as saucers, doughnuts, jet planes, cobwebs, etc. Howard Lyons talks about the Toronto fan club, The Derelicts. "No More Time" by Bill Conner is the best discussion of the nature of time and time travel I've seen. And the story, "Outside" by Elizabeth Pope it should happen to you! Ever wish you'd never been born? Careful now, it might come true . . .

A BAS: no price listed that I can see; Boyd Raeburn, 14 Lynd Ave., Toronto 3, Ontario. Issues 2 and 3. So it's from the same fan group as Canadian Fandom, but independent. The 1954 Midwestcon is hashed over by Gerald Steward. That was in the middle of May. The general tone of this fanzine is humor, dry and appreciated. For example, this paragraph: "A fan from Busbee, Scotland claiming he was Gordon Nimmons breezed through town recently. He is hitch-hiking his way around the continent. I always wondered what happened to Claude Degler . . . "

Or this one, from the letter column: from the letter of Riley Bedford, Bell, Calif.; "I can't stand jazz unless it comes straight out of New Orleans. As Kid Ory once said when a waiter dropped a tray full of dishes and silver onto the floor with a tremendous crash, 'Listen, son, we don't allow none of that modern stuff played

here.'"

And now, from the British Isles,

BEM: No. 2; one good condition prozine such as this issue of *Universe* will bring you two issues of Bem; Mal Ashworth, 40 Makin St., Tong St., Bradford 4, Yorks, England. June 1954. Fifty-one pages, mimeographed. Seventeen items on the contents page, so it's quite evident this issue is one of those monumental accomplishments where you'll find so much, and so much variety, that you'll have hours and hours of enjoyment. I'll give honorary First Place in the issue to "Journey Into Space," a science fiction novel of about two hundred words, written by Frances Cook, eight year old daughter of Arthur Cook. It's a nice solid story about a man from Earth captured by a king on another planet. He escapes with the help of a man from the lost planet, Junas, in the king's solid gold spaceship. They reach Earth and sell the solid gold ship and are rich men. I wish I'd thought of that plot for a story myself! "Convention Dragnet" by Archie Mercer is a take-off on those take-offs on Dragnet. Considering the age of Archie I think I will have to give him only second place. A very entertaining issue, Mal.

HYPHEN: July 1954; with all British fanzines you send one U.S. prozine in good condition and receive one or more issues of the fanzine: A. V. Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent, England. Utterly hilarious is Mike Wilson's "That-a-way", a pure transplant of the most corny westerns into space opera. There's quite a write-up of the Supermancon, as there was also in Bem. Vince Clarke does the write-up, starting off with, "It was a beautiful Whitsun evening when I went for the train, but that only made it worse. I felt lousy." Walt Willis' write-up, titled "The Magnificent Flop" starts off with, "The sun was shining on Manchester when Irish fandom arrived."

(Let's see how they did in BEM . . . "Saturday morning dawned warm and misty The target was the 7:30 bus . . . ") Then, (Mal starts *his* report) "This is Whit Monday, June 7th. It is a grim, gray, grimy day in Bradford and the rain is streaming past the windows . . . "

But they all went to Manchester and had a wonderful time, which is what counts.

TRIODE: 44 Barbridge Rd., Arlo, Cheltenham, England, Eric Bentcliffe, Eric Jones, and Terry Jeeves, produced "Con-Science" before the Supermancon as a sort of manual for the neofan who had

never before attended a convention. It was subtitled "The Compleat Actifan." Besides a list of equipment the fan "should" have, it covered the subject of various types of cons, such as "How to Run a Roofcon," by T. Jeeves.

At the bottom of the pile this time is a four page one-shot put out for FAPA mailing No. 69 by Walter A Willis, 170 Upper Newtonwnards Rd., Belfast, N. Ireland, emulating Charles Burbee. Co-publisher of this one-shot was Chuck R. Harris, Lake Ave., Rainham, Esser, England.

That winds up the reviews this time. The only thing I didn't review was a fanzine which I was going to give top billing—until I discovered the issues were for June, July, and August of 1953. You out-of-business fan eds who want to unload the copies you have left should try to do so through ads in fanzines. When I introduce the readers to fardom, I want it to be a *LIVE* fandom, not last year's sour apples. Send your fanzines and club reports either to the editorial offices or directly to me at Apt. 308, 6613 Normal, Chicago 21, Ill. Next issue, although it will be "old hat" by then, I'll be able to report on the convention at San Francisco, and let you know where the convention will be held next year.

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Here's a little Christmas—beg, pardon—
Clausmas story to brighten the Yuletide.

THE CLAWS IN CLAUSMAS

By Richard Hodgens & John Kirwan

THE Boss, who is in himself the official body of censure, met me at the top of the elevator to Rudolph Park. We strolled pleasantly across the domed roof of the city of North Pole, capitol of the Claus worshipping world, toward the looming, rectangular tower of Claustemple F.A.O. Schwartz II, the only building above the city's roof level.

"Do you know that there was a scholar around today who said you couldn't ban *The Book of Isaiah?*" I asked. The Boss snorted in contempt.

"He said he didn't value the book for its *mystical* content, but tearfully asked if I realized its value as literature." At that, the Boss laughed.

And that, I thought, is the eternal plea of the scholars. Don't ban such and such a book, they will say, because it is great literature. It may be obscene, but Art is beyond Mortality. It may be subversive, they will say, but don't ban it if it is a Classic.

"He claimed it wasn't dangerous," I continued aloud, "despite its almost Christion sentment. I told him that I am only a secretary, and have nohing to do with policy."

"Of course," said the Boss tolerantly, "we owe the Christians *something*, because, after all, they *started* Clausmas—"

They didn't, though, I thought. They picked an arbitrary date and used it as an excuse to continue pleasant Roman and Teutonic holiday customs, as well as

to establish a holiday of their own. Clausmas has always been a combination, but now, in the year 502 Since Claus (or, more accurately, since Saint Montgomery Ward established the first True Claus-temple), it is a complete combination. The God of Giving and Getting is an inter-racial, inter-national god.

"However," the Boss was saying, "we cannot let sentimental feelings for the extinct faiths subvert our loyalty to Santa," he puffed with the exertion of the walk.

"To think of the Christians as extinct is too convenient," I objected quietly. "They still lurk about, burning Clausmas trees, usurping the Faith, and conspiring to take the Claus out of Clausmas, in unholy alliance with the Rabbitites."

"Oh," he said scornfully, "we can ignore Rabbitiees, I think."

"But the Australian Empire is still—"

"*Australian Empire,*" he intoned derisively. "What empire?"

"There's their colony in England."

"But didn't we beat Canada nine years ago? And why worry about a mob of aborigines from Britain? Moreover, in Australia itself, the proportion of those who worship the easter bunny is decreasing, so Rabbitism poses no problem to us of the True Faith . . . Clausdamn economic plot, that Australian religion, of money-grubbing, blasphemous, Christian—"

"Anyway," I interrupted, not wishing to be treated to another lecture about how the Australians plotted to export their rabbits as objects of worship, "the scholar said that Christianity had nothing to do with THE BOOK OF ISAIAH."

"All pagans are the same to me," said the Boss. "Hebrews, Christians, or Rabbitites—they're all done for."

Naturally the Christians were done for, I thought. They were doomed as soon as they started to say, "Yes, Virginia, there *is* a Santa Claus. It's the spirit of giving. Now I wonder if I should spend five dollars or ten on your Aunt Martha this year."

"Where was this scholar from?" asked the Boss.

"Cupid City," I replied. Cupid City. Cupidity.

F.A.O. Schwartz II was tall and majestic before us. "Beautiful, beautiful," sighed the Boss. "More beautiful than Schwartz I in Blitzencity."

Blitzencity, I thought; Blitz-'em - City. Commercialization. Smother-'em-with - neon - City. A beautiful place. More miles of neon tube than any other city

in the world.

We passed a group of carolers in red and green play suits. They were singing an ancient hymn, "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus." A thrill of reverence ran through me. It was like the spiritual awe one feels when a preacher reads from the scripture about how nobody, but *nobody* ever undersold old Saint Gimbell.

We crossed the Hearth together (no one is quite sure of the reason for the tradition which makes the large square before every Claustemple the "Hearth"). Like all Claustemples, F.A.O. Schwartz II has a sooty black floor, its tower is constructed of huge blocks of red stone, and its roof, high, high above, is open so that the Spirit can descend to His worshippers.

As we entered the massive doors, we heard the tail end of the invocation issuing from the speakers beneath the giant screen in the Holy of Holies: "Only 104 shopping days until Clausmas . . . The more you give, the more you get . . . Have *you* been a good good little worshipper this year?" I knew that the sermon that would follow would give me a headache, so I left the Boss sitting in his pew, playing the slot machines, and I strolled over to the punch bar. F.A.O. Schwartz has the longest and best punch bar of any church in the world.

I gave my order: "Egg Nog." "With or without?" asked the waitress. "With, please." The waitress soon reappeared with my Egg Nog—a glass of rum with a dash of holy Egg Yolk.

The sermon dragged on and on. It was filled with large doses of scripture, like "Yes! The only helicopter designed for SANCTIFIED GIVING!" and "I dreamed I came down the chimney in my Virgin-Form Falsies." You've all heard sermons.

When it was over I returned to the Boss' pew, but he wasn't there. I looked around the Temple. Under a hanging neon-light display near the altar, I saw him talking to . . . My Claus! It was the scholar!

When I reached them the scholar glared at me with feverish eyes. This morning he was merely a run-of-the-mill thwarted scholar, but this evening he was positively stark raving. He clenched and unclenched his claw-like hands, and hissed intensely when he spoke.

"But I tell you you *can not* ban the prophecies of Isaiah," he rasped.

The Boss glared back. Under his ample jowls, his jaw was set tightly. "Look at ISAIAH 9:6," he replied. "If that isn't Anti-Santa—"

"You fool," cried the scholar. "You idiot!"

The Boss drew himself together. "You,) he said grandly, "are a Clausdamn son of a penguin. And furthermone—"

The scholar recoiled. I gasped. The Boss does not use profanity often . . . but I have *never* heard him go so far as to call someone a s.o.p. The penguin, after all, is the personification of baseness and evil, since it comes from the opposite pole.

"You're a Rabbit's uncle!" screamed the scholar. His thin hand snaked toward his hip pocket.

Fortunately, the Boss was standing on the edge of one of the swimming pools that dot the sanctuary. He tumbled backward when the scholar fired his pocket blaster.

The bolt of lethal energy hissed over the Boss's head. I didn't take time to look where it struck, but from the sound I surmised that the neon sign . . . what a mess . . . right on the altar.

The scholar pointed his gun at me. "No!" I protested. "I'm just a secretary! I—"

The Boss surfaced and screamed murder. The scholar turned and rushed from the sanctuary. I ran after him, and the Boss followed, bellowing invective that reddened my ears, and we gathered policemen as we went.

The scholar was cornered at last in the lower levels of the city. He had hidden in a huge chute and, threatening to detonate a bomb he claimed he carried, he held the police at bay and forced us to listen to a long lecture about the corruption of Clausmas. To reason with an Anti-Santa fanatic is utterly impossible. Besides, his talk bored me.

What else could I do? I am familiar with chute controls. I pulled a switch, pressed a button, and waited for the rumble to die down.

The scholar, of course was buried under five hundred tons of stale gingerbread reindeer as they hurried to the incinerator. I thought it poetic justice.

The Boss and I returned to the office.

"I want to ban something—anything!" he said.

I prudently picked a less controversial publication. "There's *'Christianity Does Not Pay,'*" I suggested.

"I ban it," he said, and fell asleep.

I turned on the video. The news was filled with eloquent praise on the deed of patriotism—as it was for days after. But not for me. I'm just a secretary. I have nothing to do with policy.

THE END

Every day she stood in the same place, at the same time, and watched the ship. Soon it would be ready to leave, but first he had to talk to her, stop her from going through with her plan.

By James McKimmey, Jr.

WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT

SHE stood in the same place at the same time, and the sun came down through the clean sky just as bright, just as warm, and all around, the earth and concrete stretched away solid and hard and just as unchanging. In the distance birds chirped from the branches of trees, and a faint wind blew the grass and the leaves, and from where she stood, of course, she could see the rocket, shining, pointing, a monstrous thing, the reason for her being here, the reason for her hate.

She didn't see him come up, didn't hear his feet against the concrete, and only until she felt his hand touching her shoulder did she quit looking at the monster and look instead into his eyes. She hadn't jumped when he touched her, and she looked at him fully, coldly. Her nerves had calmed and toughened now, and there was no frightening her anymore.

"I beg your pardon," he said smiling, and he was a tall man with a straight nose and a square but deftly cut chin. His eyes were milk blue, but there were lights in the blueness, lights of aliveness, and only the grey flecks in his hair at the temples made him seem much older than a youth.

"All right," she said.

"That's a strange thing to say," he said.

"It it?"

"I mean I said, 'I beg your pardon,' and you answered, 'All right.' "

Did you want something?" she said.

"Just to speak to you."

"Now you have," she said, turning away from him. She was yellow-haired, the hair pulled back

loosely and tied behind. She was not tall nor short, but medium, and she was well formed and pretty. She had dark brown eyes that could turn darker, and she was dressed in a simple white dress so that the tan of her arms and legs and face showed strongly against the white. She stood beside a convertible which was almost the color of her hair, resting one hand against the chrome that ran along the edge where the window was rolled down.

He kept standing there, waiting, it seemed, for her to turn to him again, to say something nicer perhaps, but she didn't. She had returned to watching the monster.

"You've come here for quite a time, haven't you?" he asked finally.

She didn't answer.

"Every day, I think," he said.

She looked at him, only moving her head, her eyes a bit darker. "Don't you have something to do, somewhere to go?"

"I wanted to talk to you," he said.

"You told me that."

"I wanted to know why you come here every day and watch."

"I couldn't explain it," she said, and she went back to watching, thinking, letting the hatred stir and grow inside of her, letting it work through her, hurting the beauty of her face, putting ugliness there, where there should have been sweetness and love and not all this bitterness.

"You hate it, don't you?" he asked.

She rubbed her tan fingers back and forth over the chrome of the car door.

"You hate it so much it shows in the way you use your eyes, your mouth, your hands."

"Yes," she said.

"Why?"

"That is no business of yours."

"I'm trying to make it my business."

"Are you morbid?" she asked suddenly, looking at him again.

"I'm not," he said. "Not at all."

"Then please leave me alone," she said.

"Tell me why," he said. "I don't think you've had anybody to tell. Why don't you tell me?"

"Why you?" she said.

"I'm nobody you know, nobody you've ever seen before, am I?"

"I don't know you," she agreed.

"Why *not* me then? What have you to lose? I've come out of nowhere, haven't I? I'm someone you could give your hate to, because you don't know me."

"I don't want to give my hate

to you," she said, "or anybody else."

"No," he said, "you want to save it for yourself, all private and selfish, so that you can let it do to you what it's doing. Hurting you. You want to be hurt, don't you?"

"I want to be alone, not talking to you," she said.

He was silent for a moment, but she knew he was still there. "It's very pretty, isn't it?" he said, softly. "Very lovely, that rocket?"

She whirled, her eyes darkening even more. "Pretty," she said. "Lovely! Are you blind? Can't you see what it is, all grim and ugly? Can't you see the death in it, and the beast? Are you blind?"

He smiled at her. "You've just given me some hate. You're that much lighter now."

"There is nothing humorous in this," she said.

"No," he said, his smile disappearing. "There isn't."

"There's nothing but nothing, one nothing after another, and when it's all done, when they've got it completed and ready to use, when they get all the men in there, locked and bound to it, when it's moving, then there's nothing but nothing after that."

Her tan fingers were clenched around the edge of the door, and the sun was coming down full, making the diamond of one ring shine, the gold of the other glisten.

"You knew somebody," he said, looking at the rings. "Somebody who went on that first one, didn't you?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him steadily. "I did."

"Who?"

"My husband," she said, her voice going cold, like iced steel.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"So am I," she said. "I'm sorry I knew him. I'm sorry he was my husband. Why don't you leave me alone?"

"I've watched you here for a long time," he said.

She didn't answer.

"I knew, really," he said, "why you were here. Even from the distance, I could see the way your eyes looked and your mouth, and I knew why you were here."

"Goodby," she said.

"It isn't fair," he said. "What you're doing."

"You're the judge," she said. "You're the jury."

"No," he said. "I'm not anything."

"That's right," she said. "You're not anything. I'm not anything. Nobody is anything. Just that rocket."

"Yes," he said quietly. "For that one moment, for that one instant when it finally moves, that's all that is anything. That rocket."

"And that's what I'm waiting for," she said. "That one moment, that one instant."

"Why?"

"So I can give it my blessings."

"Your blessings of hate."

"That's right."

"You've condemned it, haven't you?"

"I have. I've condemned it in every way I know how. I hope it works, my condemnation."

"There are men who will be on it."

"Of course."

"Living, breathing men, with hearts and minds and bodies."

"That's right."

"And you've condemned them?"

"Every one of them."

"Because of him."

"Right again."

"Is that fair?"

She laughed, a cold sparkling kind of laugh that was unlike the shape of her face, hands, or body, but like the shade of her eyes, the expression of her mouth. "That word again," she said.

"Is it funny?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "It's pretty funny."

"Why?"

"You said fair. You said it right here in the shadow of that rocket, right within sight of *it*, so *it* could hear you saying it. Don't you think *it's* laughing right now, just like I am? Don't you think that's pretty funny, for *it* to hear you say that word?"

She watched his eyes, the milk blue of them, the faint lights deep in that blueness, and she had to look away.

"I think I've figured it out" he said.

"Good for you."

"You blame the rocket. You blame him. He went away in one just like it and left you here, alone, and he didn't come back. So you blame him and you blame the rocket and everything associated with it."

"That's right," she said.

"Will that do any good?"

"Yes,"

"What good will it do?"

"It'll do me good," she said.

"Hating?"

"Hating."

"It wasn't the rocket's fault," he said.

"No?"

"It wasn't his fault either."

"Oh, no."

"You can't disregard everything, just for yourself. You have to open up and give a little bit of

yourself, to keep up with time. Time moves and you've got to move with it. Closing up and trying to keep all of yourself won't work, don't you know that?"

"Go away," she said, rubbing her fingers along the sun-warmed chrome.

"I will," he said. "But first I want to ask you not to condemn anymore. I want to ask you to forget being bitter and forget hating, will you?"

"Why?" she asked.

"Because pretty soon it's going to leave, that rocket, and everything has to be just right."

"Do you think my hating, my condemning can hurt it?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"No," he said, "it isn't good. It's deadly. There mustn't be anything wrong. Everything has got to be right."

"It wasn't the first time. Why should it be this time?"

"Because this time everything has *got* to be right. There has to be faith, in everyone, in everything, and then it will work, don't you see that?"

"It didn't work the first time," she insisted.

"Why didn't it?" he asked coldly.

"Because it's a monster, that thing."

"No, it isn't a monster. It's just metal and fibers and wires and glass. It's just a mechanical thing, with no soul, no life, only that which we make it."

"Why didn't it work the first time then?" she said.

"Because there was a lack of faith somewhere, little bits of doubts and misgivings and threads of hatred. It didn't have enough spirit given to it, and somewhere, up there, it died."

"That's foolish," she said.

"No, it isn't."

"Do you think that it was my fault then? Some of that failure was my fault, and I ought to be standing here, blaming myself and not *it* or him or anything but me?"

"I do."

She laughed again. And then she was back looking at his eyes, the soft blueness of them, the lights. She stopped laughing. "What should I do then?"

"Pray for it," he said. "Give it your faith this time. Hope with it, work with it, fight with it. Set your mind to it and think of nothing else but that it *will* work."

"Would that help? Would that make up in any way at all for what happened the first time?"

"Yes," he said.

She shook her head. "It would-

n't help," she said.

"Yes it would. It really would. You have to work with it this time, you have to urge and push in your brain, you have to be that one small fragment, like the link in a chain, and you can't break or let down. You have to encourage and bless, bless with all your might."

"I'll bless all right," she said.

"Not that way," he said. "Rightly, with all your might."

She looked across the grass and the flat concrete, and she saw it resting there, great and shining, pointing to the sky, a vast thing, strong with energy, ready, waiting. "Bless the rocket, bless the men in it," she said.

"Yes," he whispered. "Bless it, bless them . . . bless me."

She looked at him quickly, fully. He smiled; pleadingly, she thought.

"You?"

"Me. Will you?" he asked, and then he turned and walked away from her, across the concrete, over the grass, onto the other concrete. She watched him, a lonely figure, moving, moving, and the time hung motionless, the sun shone, the wind drifted, and then, finally, the monster had swallowed him.

She closed her eyes, searching within herself. She fought the bitterness, she fought the hatred. Try, she thought. Just try it, anyway. "Bless you," she said, moving her lips with it. The bitterness and the hatred fought back. "Bless you," she said again, speaking it out loud this time, and then something did come alive within her, something small, infinitesimal, but it came alive: she could feel it. "Bless you," she said, repeating it, and she straightened herself, lifting her chin. She heard the sound then, the roar, the splitting roar, but she didn't open her eyes. "Bless you," she repeated, over and over, while the air turned hotter than the sun had made it, red with the jets, and her ears pounded with the roar. "Bless you," she chanted. "Bless you, bless you, bless you . . . ■

—The End—

COVERING THE COVER

(And Miscellaneous Other Subjects)

A manuscript arrived in my office the other day, leaving me somewhat confused –which isn't too hard to do. The article was plainly marked *Editorial, January* 1955 *UNIVERSE*, and was from R. A. Palmer. The confusion arose from the fact that earlier this month I had received an editorial from Rap, and it was already set in type and proof-read. Now comes a second one, barely reaching me in time to be included in this issue. Paraphrasing the Great Holmes, I said to myself, "You know Palmer's methods, Mahaffey; apply them." And I came up with several possible answers, which I've narrowed down to the two most likely.

First, and most probably the correct answer, is that Rap simply forgot that he had already written an editorial for this issue.

A second, and much more colorful, solution to the problem is this: As Rap mentions in the following article, it's difficult to reach him by phone, and almost impossible to get him to answer a letter. I recall writing him at least three letters requesting an editorial for the January issue and phoning him once. In order to teach me not to be so insistent, he may be sending me one editorial for each request, hoping that I'll be so confused as to which one to use and what to do with the extras that in the future I'll send him only one reminder. If this is the case, I should be receiving two more January editorials in the next week or so. By then, this issue will have gone to press, and the editorials can be returned to him or held for the next issue.

Time was, back in the years when Rap was editing *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures*, when I had a ritual for reading any issue. I would first admire the cover, then scan the contents page for the names of favorite authors. The next step was to thumb through the magazine looking at the illustrations. After this had been done, I would turn to the editorial and read it before starting any of the stories. Rap's editorials covered any and all topics, jumping from subject to subject rapidly and with no apparent connection. Many of you readers have written in to say that this is the type of editorial you prefer, and I certainly agree with you. So, when Rap's Editorial II arrived, it seemed to me that it filled the bill perfectly, bringing you up to date on current *Universe* doings, in a style reminiscent of the old AS and FA Palmer editorials. Am I right? —Bea

* * *

Live and learn. That's what they say. Now, if we were writing an editorial for our sister magazine, *Mystic*, we'd probably start off by saying: Die and learn. Personally we think you can learn more by dying and living, but we also feel it's a good idea to learn as much as you can while you are living! And thus, this issue, we are beginning to learn something new for us: we are learning how to prepare covers for the engravers—which up to now has always been done by the art director, or at least by an artist.

We discover there is a lot to learn. Even about so simple a thing as "how do the titles get on the cover, anyhow?" How *do* they? Well, first they are set in type. But do we *use* the type to print the titles on the cover? Heck no—we only use it to make an etching proof; then we cut it out with a scissors and paste it on a piece of cardboard along with the logo (name of magazine and a lot of other junk like the date, "K" for Kable News Co. (our distributor). You didn't know that's how newsdealers tell where to return the magazine, did you? There's an "ANC" somewhere on a cover which goes back to American News Co., and there's an "ID" for International Distributors, and so on.

Next, we find *all* the type does not go on the same board! Why? Because some of it might be printed in *another* color. There are three (or more) plates to be made. Well, after we've made all the pasteups, they go to an engraver, who photographs them, then makes a set of engravings. The engravings then go to the printer, who *doesn't* print from them. Ye gods! When *do* we print? Well, the printer has to make printing plates, sometimes known as "stereos" and sometimes as "electros". (They even print from plastics these days!) But do they make the "stereos" directly from your engravings? Heck, no! They make "mats", out of paper, and then pour melted metal on them.

Then they print!

So we're learning. And the reason is our artist who previously did the work got so busy he couldn't handle us any more. And now that we've learned how, we've decided we might as well save the money and continue doing it ourselves. So, if you see some queer things on the cover, like titles upsidedown or straying off the page, or just plain missing (our glue didn't stick), don't wonder about it—an amateur is at work!

By the way, how do you like our new type cover? We're going to use photos for a while, to see how it works out. And along that line, maybe there are some amateur photographers among our readers who would get a kick out of dreaming up some sort of science-fiction cover, with fake stuff, or double exposure, or models or sets, and if so, we'd be happy to see some of your efforts and who can tell, we might even buy one for a cover! As a matter of fact, what's wrong with holding a contest? We'll pay $25.00 for the best cover photo submitted to us before March 1, 1955, and will consider those who don't cop first place as possible covers for purchase at our regu-

lar rates. Get out your camera and your model and go to it! (Say that might be fun, dressing your model in cellophane and making like a BEM!)

On the cover this month you might have noticed the name of T. P. Caravan, who, up to now, had only done humorous and slapstick shorts for us, (and very well too!) Well, now he's done a long story called "The Shoemaker of Lan" and we think you're going to like it. It's unusual, along with Frank M. Robinson's unusual "Santa Claus Planet". This Santa Claus story is in our January issue rather than December because January goes on sale in November. Clear? Over and out!

Anyway, Merry Christmas to you all, and a very Huppy New Yahr.

We got a letter today from Edmond Hamilton, in which he says: "The sequel to Starman Come Home is belting along well, and I think this will be a good hot yarn in its own right." Well, if Ed says it's going to be hot, who are we to contradict him? So why not sit right down and write us a letter, enclosing three bucks for a subscription, so you don't miss this yarn? We'll announce it when it's scheduled, of course, but with sales booming the way they are (we sell almost half as many as we used to sell before science fiction became the rage), it's hard to tell if you'll be able to find a copy at your newsstands. Remember that "K" on the cover: it means Kash 'em in Kwick before they Kroak. You got to buy quick these days before the competition buries your favorite magazine beneath a pile of other people's favorite magazines.

A lot of people write us letters, and expect an answer. Well, that's useless, because we haven't time. We print your letter if we can, but we don't answer it. So, some people think they'll fool us, and use the telephone. Now that won't won't work either, and here's why: The Amherst Telephone Company s just a small outfit, and they hook up their switchboard to the barbwire fence just out of town, and we subscribers just hook up our phones to the fence in front of the house. So reception isn't so good. In fact, on long distance calls we can't hear a thing, so it's useless even to try to phone us. This is very handy, in a way, because individuals claiming to be Venusians can't bother us, and authors can't reach us to ask when we are going to pay for their manuscript published back in 1952. The correct answer, or course, is sometime in 1956. We mention that for those who might be curious. But we *will* pay. We just don't like to be hasty about spending money other people are not hasty in sending us. Pay as you are paid, is our motto. Seems to be the good old Republican way of doing business— and a right smart way, too! You can go into debt jumping the gun!

However, things aren't really so dark in the science fiction field as they were. Things are picking up slowly, and they will return to normal. We think you've noticed that the last three issues have been lulus in regard to stories. They've been very good stories. Authors aren't riding along on a tidal wave

now—they're really having to paddle. And the result is the guy who knows which end of the oar to pound his typewriter with is the guy who is now appearing in print. The guy who never deserved to appear in print has gone back to *Satevepost* and *Colliers*.

This issue marks an anniversary for us. Two years ago (or rather, 24 issues ago) we were riding the crest, and wanted to go monthly. So we asked our readers to subscribe to a special 25-issue subscription for $5.00, and promised them lifetime renewal rights at that 20c per copy rate if they'd do it in sufficient numbers to help us go monthly. Well, they did, and we went monthly, and also increased our distribution by 35,000 copies—*exactly the same month the big slump began!* Well, that was with good old *Other Worlds*, and strangely, ironically, the net result of the great assistance we got from those wonderful readers was the death of OW. Today we like to think that *Universe* is the old OW come back to life. Actually, it is. The same old girl with a new name. And thus, we want to remind our subscribers that the offer still holds. You who have an "R" after your name in our files, are entitled for life to a 20c renewal rate. Thus, when you get a notice in this issue, or the next, or the next, that your subscription is expiring, you can automatically assume that you will get credit for your renewal at the special rate. So, send it in. And we sincerely hope you'll do that little thing 100%, because we really need your help again. But don't do it if you feel *Universe* isn't a real nice magazine, and you really *want* to read it. We haven't any big ideas about leading the field this time, but only to use every cent we get to make *Universe* as fine a bit of reading as we can.

Last time we asked our readers to subscribe, we had 58,000 readers. We got 1½ percent of them to subscribe! This time, why can't we get 5% to subscribe? Is it impossible? It shouldn't be! Look what you get if you do subscribe—*ten free issues* of *Other Worlds* and *Science Stories!* So if you are a comparative newcomer to science fiction, here's your chance to read some of the old classics which many old-time readers remember as material that made OW so good its editor forgot himself and got a silly old swelled head and lost his good judgment! Take a glance at the renewal coupon in this issue and that big free offer!

You know, Bea is supposed to write part of this editorial, so we will quit now and let her add anything she has to say. Actually she ought to write it all, because the last three issues she's done entirely herself, and we've noted the vast improvement in the stories. She's doing okay, and we think maybe the quality she's put into the magazine will be the most powerful arguement in persuading you to subscribe.—*Rap*

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Stf League of Indiana. Dues are $3.00 *a year in Indianapolis,* $1.50 *elsewhere. Members receive the club fanzine and newsletter, plus the fanzine and newszine of the League. For further information, write Edward McNulty,* 5645 *N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Indiana* . . . Two Martians are starting a fan club, The Aliens, and need members. Central headquarters will be in Minneapolis, Minn., with bull sessions for local members and a fan-mag for all members. The first 25 to join will receive a stf novel free. Send 25c plus name and address to The Aliens, 2729 Aldrich Avenue South, Minneapolis 8, Minn. The 25c is for the first edition of the fan mag . . . *Wanted: GALAXY, Vol.* 1 *entire,* 1 & 3 *of Vol.* 2, *No.* 5 *of Vol.* 5 *and No.* 4 *of Vol.* 7 *F&SF, all of Vol.* 1 & 2, *No.* 2 *of Vol.* 3 *and No.* 4 *of Vol.* 6. *Want to correspond with fen age* 1 *to* 100. *Send mags, letters, cards and messenger rockets to Jim Wilson,* 693 *Evans St., Oshkosh, Wisc* . . . The American Science Fantasy Society invites visitors and prospective members to attend our meetings which feature famed guest speakers and stf pro's. A writer's work shop is already being formed for aspiring authors. Meetings are held every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month, in Hall A-1, Werderman's Hall, 3rd Avenue and 16th Street, New York City . . . *For sale:* "1948" *in good cond., no d/w,* $1.00; *ERB's "Tarzan of the Apes" (A. C. McClurg,* 1914), *good cond., no d/w,* $2.00. *Would like pen pals from anywhere. Dainis Bisenieks,* 336 *S. Warren, Saginaw, Mich.*

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Dear Ray:

Congratulations on a superb set up of the September issue No. 7 of UNIVERSE. All four stories were excellent. Evan Hunter really did a good job with his story "Terwilliger & The War Time Machine." The best, though, was "Starman Come Home." I finished it last night at 10:30 pm.

Glad to see the PERSONALS column back in full swing again with old and new faces in it. Also hope to see some new fanzines reviewed in "The Club House" for a change instead of the old stand bys.

When the blazes is Rog going to write some more stories for UNIVERSE?

Keep getting in more good stories and I'll be a permanent reader. In fact, with the PERSONALS column and THE CLUB HOUSE back in operation again after a long rest period I can hardly wait til ish No. 8.

Raleigh Evans Multog
7 Greenwood Road
Pikesville 8, Maryland

P. S. Are there any fans who would like to correspond with me from Idaho? That is one State that is hard to get pen-pals from.

Come on, you Idaho fen, are you going to let him talk about your state like that? Get busy and flood him with letters.—Bea.

Dear RAP and Bea:

Congratulations are in order for the new Universe. Like most former Other Worlds subscribers, I began receiving Universe and Science Stories after OW folded. I actually liked USF better than its companion, but was happy with both mags. I seriously felt that if you retained both magazines, that you should both take one on, and therefore split the chores evenly. But with ScS gone, I'm sure that USF will go on to retain, and intensify, the flavor and color of the old OW.

There is just one request I have to make, now that you've given us an Ed Hamilton epic, and that is where are the Joe Gibson novelettes? Joe was one of the most promising writers in OW's fold, and I'm sure Universe readers would like to see more of him.

I have a Personals item enclosed,

and the moment I get my greedy little hands on the price of a subscription. I will stop hunting for Universe, and let the U. S. Mail deliver it to me.

John G. Trimble, Pfc
2450 Easy Avenue
Long Beach 10, California

We've gloated over your kind words, we've published your Personals item, and we're now watching the mail for your sub. As for Joe Gibson stories, we can't print 'em if Joe won't write 'em. Haven't seen any of his stories lately, but maybe this will start him going again. Let's hope so, because he's done some really good stories for us in the past—too far in the past to suit us!—Bea

Dear Ray,

Since I have finished reading the September issue of Universe I thought I'd drop you a line and tell you what I though of it. Here is my rating of the stories in that issue. 1) Starman Come Home. 2) The Crazy Man. 3) Terwilliger & The War Machine. 4) Symtomaticus Medicus. Starman Come Home was one of the finest novels I have ever read. It ranks with S. J. Byrne's Powewr Metal. It is truly a novel I shall never forget. On the whole I think I can say that it was the finest issue of a magazine I have read and I'm not saying that because I had a letter of mine published in it. I also liked the cover. I don't mind scant-

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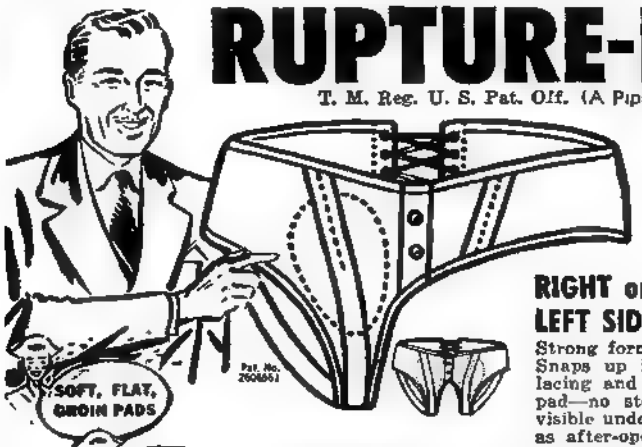

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These are the things that I am looking forward to in future issues of Universe. 1) The return of OW's back cover and missing pages. 2) More stories by Edmond Hamilton, John Bloodstone, S. J. Byrne, Rog Phillips, and last but not least Ray Palmer. You write pretty good stories.

In closing this letter I'd like to list the reasons why I enjoy Universe and why it's my favorite mag. Good stories, good covers and illustrations, and it's *Palmerized* like Don Wegars says. In my book, Universe takes a back seat to no one! It's great!

Paul Corley
627 Sheridan Road
Winnetka, Illinois.

We, too, are looking forward to bringing back the extra pages and back cover paintings, but all those things take time and money. We'll do our best, though, and maybe it won't take too long. If You've read the editorial you know that you can be watching for more Hamilton—a Starman sequel!

—Bea

Dear Sir:

We are very sorry to take your time, but we haven't any relations in this wonderful land of George Washington.

I got your address from a copy of "Science Stories" and other of "Universe" and thought you could put us in contact with some fellow or girl readers of your magazines, and therefore, we enclose here our addresses with the plea you will do all you can for us. We want to exchange correspondence, books,

photographs and so on; and in case we go to North America we would have relations.

My name is Richard, I am now 17 years old and prefer to maintain correspondence with girls and boys no older than 18. Betty is 20 years old and wants to exchange letters with fellows no older than 27.

I give you my best congratulations for your publications. I enjoyed very much your copy of "Universe" No. 3 (December 1953) in which are presented the short stories "On Mars We Trod" and "The Savages". Everest" is also good but I like better 'The Adventure Of The Misplaced Hound."

It is a pity that I can't get those magazines here and that I can't afford a subscription—I'd like it very much. It is also very expensive to buy these magazines here.

We hope you will find some people who want to write us. If it does cost money, we'll gladly pay. I beg your pardon for keeping you busy and we thank you very much. Please, write me (Richard) in English or German.

Richard Albert Ertl
Rioja 470 Street
Posadas—MISIONES
ARGENTINA
and
Lyda Betty Vignoles
Rivadavia 396 Street
Posadas—MISIONES
ARGENTINA

One of the many things that science-fiction fans are interested in is corresponding with other fans, so you and Shirley should get quite a few pen pals from the U.S. And since you find it difficult to obtain U.S. magazines and books, I'm sure you'll be able to arrange some sort of trading deal to supplement your supply. Welcome to the Universe family, and we hope you like some of the current and future issues as well as you did those in the past.—Bea.

Dear Bea:

Your subscription service is improving—*UNIVERSE* reached my mailbox only three days after I'd picked it up at the drug store. The last few ishes were anywhere upwards from a month late. If you print this letter, I should like to go on record as advising all your readers to take advantage of the reciprocal agreement between the Palmer mags and *AUTHENTIC*. Received my 5th ish of the latter and it's quite good.

Edmond Hamilton wrote some pretty good space opera. The kind of story that sells copies. Seems I remember RAP expressing some dissatisfaction with said type in No. 3 OW, though. The yarn about Terwilliger and the Martians was unbelievable (even as S-F). Alan Nourse could've done worse as could R. J. McGregor.

I agree with Earl Kemp, only I'd prefer a 1,000,000 word novel. I imagine this is impossible at present, though. Somehow short stories don't go over well with me. They depend too much on gimmicks.

Have been reading some back ishes of *FA* (*FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*) and it struck me that *OW* really was just a continuation of said mag as *UNIVERSE* is a continuation of *OW*. I'm dis-

appointed that *USF* has dropped the type of story that made those first two mags tos in my book. I enjoyed such as "Slaves of the Worm," the Colossus Trilogy and S. J. Byrne's subsequent sequel. Had hoped Mystic would feature such stories, but it looks like we're going to get three ishes of *FATE* every two months. Brrrrrr. Has Wlh got a monoply on C. F. Meyers and Toffee?

Would like correspondence with any S-F addicts who read 10 or more mags a month (S-F mags, of course).

Ed Luksus
3717 Johnson St.
Gary, Ind.

Tell me, Ed, do you have your own personal and private jinx where your Universe sub is concerned? Seems to me that you've been having more trouble than the rest of our subscribers combined. Pretty soon I'm going to resort to sending your sub by carrier pigeon, three *weeks in advance of the on sale date. So you think Hamilton wrote "some pretty good space opera," do you? Well, I think he wrote some pretty terrific space opera, and I'm watching the mail closely for his sequel. Mixed in with all the other types of stf, I personally like a good old fingernail-biting, edge-of-the-chair type of space opera where the hero wades through obstacles galore to emerge victorious, with the heroine draped adoringly on hisarm. And I have lots of company, because 99% of the letters we received about this issue called Hamilton's story "the best in years," and asked for more.—Bea*

WHAT WOULD YOU DO

if you found

A GOOD THING?

You'd pass it on to your friends, wouldn't you? Well, that's exactly what Ray Palmer is doing in this ad, which is a **personal** endorsement. You know how he grouses about the way things fall apart ten minutes after you buy them, or they fail entirely to perform their purpose? Shoddy products from shoddy workmen, he calls them, and he suspects it's a deliberate inferiority component to cheat you. So when he finds something that's really good but hasn't a chance because it's put out by an honest man who can't buck the big BUSINESS boys, he ballyhoos it. You see, Ray's had dandruff for years, and no product he ever bought did a bit of good. Then, through Ken Arnold, he met Guy L. Turner, of Boise, Idaho. Well, Guy has a hair treatment that licked Ray's dandruff in ten days! Although Guy doesn't claim it, the stuff cures a lot of skin ailments, not only scalp ailments. At least it cured his wife's rash. So, if you're like Ray, and appreciate an honest man and an honest product, here's his tip to you: Get

TURN-ER'S

It Turns Hair Back To Its Natural Color, And It Cures Dandruff Positively.

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Ray Palmer, Amherst, Wisc.

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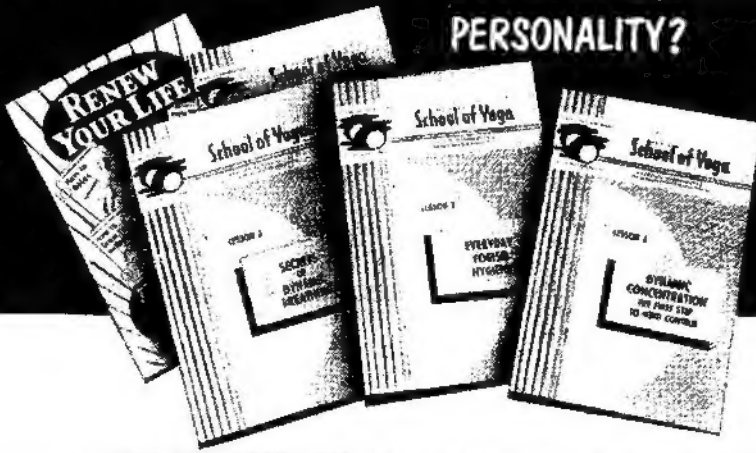

TEST YOURSELF

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Are you satisfied with your mental power?
☐	☐	Can you concentrate?
☐	☐	Do you feel rested when you get up in the morning?
☐	☐	Do you finish every job you tackle?
☐	☐	Are you in tip-top shape physically?
☐	☐	Is your posture good?
☐	☐	Do you control tension, fear, worry, "nerves"?
☐	☐	Do people like you?
☐	☐	Do you have lots of friends?
☐	☐	Are you "getting ahead" in your work?
☐	☐	Do you use the power of your subconscious mind?
☐	☐	Is your life full, successful, happy?

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